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ABSTRACT

The Newspaper section of the Proceedings contains the following 14 papers: "Caught in the Web: Newspaper Use of the Internet and Other Online Resources" (Bruce Garrison); "'Powerful' Attributive Verbs and 'Body Language' Statements Revisited" (Sherrie L. Wilson); "Community Journalism at Work: Newspapers Putting More Emphasis on Importance of Local News" (David Kaszuba and Bill Reader); "Local Press Coverage of Environmental Conflict: A Content Analysis of 'The Daily Review,' 1985-1994" (Claire E. Taylor, Jung-Sook Lee, and William R. Davie); "The Impact of Beat Competition on City Hall Coverage" (Stephen Lacy, David C. Coulson, and Charles St. Cyr); "Newspaper Coverage of Medicine: A Survey of Editors and Cardiac Surgeons" (Raymond N. Ankney, Richard A. Moore, and Patricia Heilmann); "Effect of Structural Pluralism and Corporate News Structure on News Source Perceptions of Critical Content" (David K. Demers and Debra L. Merskin); "Handling Hate: A Content Analysis of Washington State's Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes and White Supremacists" (Virginia Whitehouse); "Superstars or Second-Class Citizens? Management and Staffing Issues Affecting Newspapers' Online Journalists" (Jane B. Singer, Martha P. Tharp, and Amon Haruta); "50 Years Later: 'What It Means To Miss the Paper': Berelson, Dependency Theory, and Failed Newspaper Delivery" (Clyde Bentley); "Newspaper Omsbudsmanship as Viewed by Omsbudsmen and Their Editors" (Kenneth Starck and Julie Eisele); "Free Trade or Fair Trade?: The U.S. Auto Trade Policy and the Press" (Kuang-Kuo Chang); "Australian Newspaper Gatekeepers: Their Use of Readership Research" (Kerry Philip Green); and "Sources of the Decline in Newspaper Reading: Examining Long-Term Changes by Means of Nonlinear Trend Decomposition" (Wolfram Peiser). (CR)

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CAUGHT IN THE WEB:
NEWSPAPER USE OF THE INTERNET
AND OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

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CAUGHT IN THE WEB:
NEWSPAPER USE OF THE INTERNET
AND OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews use of the World Wide Web and other online services by U.S. daily newspapers. The study analyzes general computer use, value placed on the Web as a news tool, preferred browsers, search tools, most widely used sites, site qualities and problems, and online successes and failures in 1997. General computer use is at 88% and online use is at 90%. Daily use has almost doubled and about 92% of newspapers use the Web. Furthermore, online research by reporters has increased to 48% from 25% two years earlier. AltaVista and Yahoo! are leading search tools, but local government sites are most used for reporting. Journalists seek valid and useful information and verification is the main problem.

CAUGHT IN THE WEB:
NEWSPAPER USE OF THE INTERNET
AND OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

The World Wide Web is becoming the dominant online research tool used by journalists. As a growing amount of newsworthy and credible resources on the Internet became available, use of the Web increased. By 1998, most news organizations have made the Web and other Internet tools available to news researchers, reporters, and others in the newsroom (Miller, 1998; Reddick & King, 1997; Garrison, 1998; Parsons & Johnson, 1996; Ross & Middleberg, 1997). For many people, the Web represents the Internet. Experienced users realize there are numerous additional Internet tools and resources available. However, many of these tools and resources are converting to the Web's hypertext markup language format. Most Internet Gopher sites, for example, have moved to the Web and are disappearing from the Gopher system. Similarly, most major commercial and private bulletin board systems have also become Web sites. Telnet and file transfer protocol software have become parts of the leading Web browsers. The commercial online services provide complete Web access and offer full-feature Web browsers for customers. Some online services have just about abandoned their original information content mission and assumed primary roles as Internet service providers (Garrison, 1998; Reddick & King, 1997).

Tim Berners-Lee developed the foundation of the World Wide Web in 1989. Lee was on the staff of CERN, the European Laboratory for Particle Physics in Bern, Switzerland (Ford, 1995; Branscomb, 1998; Lehto & Polonsky, 1996; Cady & McGregor, 1995; Peal, 1994). The Web only began to go public, that is, to grow in 1993 or so, when the first Web browser

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software was released. This was a software program— primitive compared to Web software packages available today— called Mosaic (Lehto & Polonsky, 1996; Hahn & Stout, 1994). Even with Mosaic distributed for free, the Web grew slowly but steadily during 1993 and 1994 (Ford, 1995; Cady & McGregor, 1995).

The Web seems to have a bright future as the centerpiece of global computer communication and for much research as the new century nears (Lehto & Polonsky, 1996). As an industry in the business of gathering and processing information, newspapers appear poised to give the Web a critical role in newsrooms for both newsgathering and for news distribution. As recently as five years ago, few people in the news business discussed the uses of electronic mail, the World Wide Web, news groups, distribution lists, file transfer, databases, or other Web resources. At that time, very few news people used the Web and E-mail (Castro, 1997; Garrison, 1995, Ross & Middleberg, 1997). The proliferation of newspaper-based Web sites demonstrates how the newspaper industry has embraced the Web as a potential distribution tool.

In 1995, Web use seemed to explode and global computer-based communication changed forever. In the computer industry, perhaps in communication also, 1995 was the year of the World Wide Web. In fact, the Internet grew so much between 1995 and 1997 that the original users of the network— government and educational-research institutions— began development of a second, even higher speed private research network known as Internet 2.

So why is the World Wide Web popular with journalists? It has high information potential and provides the information in an integrated manner (McGuire, Stilborne, McAdams & Hyatt, 1997; Parsons & Johnson, 1996; Koch, 1996). It is visually powerful and sensually appealing. It is not necessarily text based and has complete multi-media capacity. The Web networks permit a wide range of people to connect to an even wider range of computer systems and use resources on those servers. And, of course, it provides useful information on demand (Branscomb, 1998; Reddick & King, 1997; Koch, 1996, Ross & Middleberg, 1997).

"Use of the Web is extremely easy. It requires little time for most people to get a good grasp of how to use the various browsers or search engines," noted Ernie Hines (Garrison, 1998, n.p.), editor of the *Tri-Valley Herald*, a 40,000-circulation daily newspaper in Pleasanton, Calif. "Research is more convenient than text research. You also have access to far more resources, including many that you might not normally think of. It is time consuming. Research engines do not typically allow time frames and advanced searching with linked works is often outside the range of the search engine."

Researchers Steven S. Ross and Don Middleberg (1997) have studied journalists' use of the Web annually since 1994 and found that journalists have embraced the Web and that they often use dial-up services. They find E-mail valuable in addition to their use of the Web. They also learned frequency of use is increasing. Further, they found that journalists want Web sites to stick to facts, perhaps with photographs, but journalists do not want graphics of low news value. Their research showed the Yahoo! index, the Netscape search page, and the AltaVista search engine as the leading search tools. The study also concluded that credibility of the Web site matters to journalists. Non-profit sites, for example, have more value as news sources than corporate sites for journalists in their study, they concluded.

Of course, as Ross and Middleberg (1997) found, the World Wide Web is becoming a very practical news gathering resource. The network linked as many as 82 million computers in 1997, according to one estimate (Anon., 1997, October 21). Another recent analysis reports that about half of the companies in the United States. had Web sites in 1997. The majority (66%) of these are designed for advertising and public relations purposes (RHI Consulting, 1997), but the information content of the sites may still be useful to journalists for basic information. Users of the Web know it offers a lot, especially for journalists. E-mail and Usenet Newsgroups have also become valued tools among journalists (Tolhurst, Pike, Blanton & Harris, 1994; Kurland, Messere & Palombo, 1997; Reddick & King, 1995, Ross & Middleberg, 1997).

Finding information on the Internet remains troubling for journalists— even experienced professionals. Searching on the Internet and the World Wide Web is a necessity for journalists because of its size and scope. The thousands of servers and millions of pages make bookmarks a convenience, but not a basis for a thorough search and retrieve strategy. There are hundreds of search tools on the Web, ranging from very general to very specific and from single-search to meta-search approaches. Search strategies for the best approaches are necessary. "While the Web's entertaining and packed with useful information, it's very difficult to find what you're looking for," wrote Web search expert and University of Virginia Professor Bryan Pfaffenberger (1996, pp. 1-2). "It won't be long before mastery of the Web will be *de rigueur* for professionals in just about any line of work."

How do newspapers use the World Wide Web and other online resources? The purpose of this study is to answer that general research question. There is interest in how this emerging technology is taking its place among information gatherers and processors in the news business. The focus of this paper is to summarize findings of exploratory research about:

- General computer use in newsrooms
- Value placed on the World Wide Web as a news tool
- Preferred browser software used for newsgathering
- Search tools in use in newsrooms
- Most widely used Web sites for newsgathering
- Qualities of strong and weak Web sites for newsgathering
- Problems with Web sites used in newsgathering
- Online successes and failures in newsrooms

STUDY METHODS

This study is based on mail surveys with a longitudinal design. Self-administered questionnaires were mailed to a census of daily newspapers with circulation 20,000 or more copies on Sundays each spring from 1994 through 1997. Questionnaires were developed from interviews with journalists and from group discussions at national conferences about investigative reporting, computer-assisted reporting, and news research. While most of the questions used each year were the same, some questions were added or deleted from individual instruments as changes in availability of tools or use of computers dictated. A copy of the complete 1997 questionnaire is available at http://www.miami.edu/com/car/index.htm and the 1994, 1995, and 1996 questionnaires may be obtained by request.

The unit of analysis was the newspaper. Questionnaires were mailed with postage-paid return envelopes to either the computer-assisted reporting supervisor, the managing editor, or the executive editor. When sent to a general editor, recipients were asked to forward the questionnaire to individuals most qualified to respond. This resulted in a mix of specialists serving as respondents, including investigative reporters, CAR specialists, news librarians, news researchers, and editors. Respondents were asked to respond on behalf of the entire newsroom, indicating their perceptions of newsroom use. While a longitudinal design was used and consistency in individuals responding at a particular newspaper each year was sought, the same individual did not always respond because of turnover and changing responsibilities.

Population sizes were approximately 510 newspapers in 1997, 510 in 1996, 514 in 1995, and 514 in 1994. In each survey, follow-up mailings were used to enhance response rates. In 1994, one follow-up mailing was utilized, but in the 1995, 1996, and 1997 surveys, two follow-up mailings were used. Response rates were n = 226, or 44.3% in 1997; n = 233, 45.7%, in 1996; n = 287, 56.5%, in 1995; and n = 208, 40.5%, in 1994. Respondent newspaper demographics have been consistent over the four years. Response patterns represent all regions of the country and have produced a mean circulation each year of about 115,000 copies. Respondents each year have been either editors, computer-assisted reporting supervisors, news researchers, or investigative or special project reporters. Because the study involved analysis of a population, not a sample, statistical tests are not reported.

OVERVIEW AND FINDINGS

For newspapers, computer use in newsgathering has grown steadily in the past four years. The increasing use has occurred at two levels. First, journalists have become more dependent on the World Wide Web and the Internet as sources of information and of data in their daily stories and projects. Second, overall use of computers in newsgathering has increased noticeably once again in 1997.

To most Americans, the main concerns about the World Wide Web seem to be censorship and privacy. Some users with low levels of computer literacy are concerned about navigating and finding information on the Web. But for journalists, there are even more specific issues. Slightly more than two in three respondents (67.8%) in the 1997 survey—the first time the question was asked— felt the Web was "important" to news reporting. Another 26.8% felt it was not important. Furthermore, journalists listed mastery of the World Wide Web as the highest priority (26.2%) for computer skills in the newsroom. Data literacy (23.8%), Windows literacy (16.7%), word processing skills (14.9%), being both Mac and PC literate (6.5%), and general online skills (6.0%) were also rated high.

1—General Computer Use, Online Use in Newsrooms

Use of computers in information gathering has grown steadily every year in the past four years, from a base of 66% in 1994 to 88% in 1997, as shown in Table 1. The number of newsrooms using a CAR *desk* has been flat, at 44% in 1997. A number of newsrooms have left the CAR desk model and replaced it with the total CAR integration into the newsroom model. This tends to occur more when dedicated production hardware is replaced with a PC network.

Training is growing slowly, at about 53% in 1997. In-house training has doubled from 22% in 1995 to 44% in 1997. The number of individuals involved in CAR reflects the movement toward total newsroom integration, more than doubling from its mean level of 3.5 persons in 1994 to 7.9 persons in 1997.

The proportion of newsrooms using online resources has also grown over the past four years, as Table 2 indicates. Beginning with a base of 57.2% in 1994, use has grown to 89.8% in 1997. Of the declining number of newsrooms not using online resources, the major reason cited is lack of hardware and software (36.4% in 1997). Lack of expertise or the more generic comment, "just starting," was cited by 18.2% each, data in Table 3 show. The other major shift in the past four years has been in frequency of use of online tools. Daily use has jumped from 27.4% in 1994 to 51.8% in 1997, as indicated in Table 4. Similarly, the proportion of newsrooms not using or not reporting use has declined from 38.9% in 1994 to 5.3% in 1997.

2—Leading Online Resources, Researchers in Newsrooms

Growth of the Internet and World Wide Web has been significant and steady over the past four years. As shown in Table 5, use of the Internet and Web has grown from 25.0% in 1994 to 91.6% in 1997. America Online, an international entry-level service that offers affordable Internet access for smaller news organizations, has also grown from 17.3% in 1994 to 42.5% in 1997. With the growth of local government on Web sites and other online services, use of local government online has also increased faster than other services.

With the increase in use of online resources, there has been a benchmark shift in the nature of information searching in newsrooms. A decade ago, the limited commercial online services were solely the responsibility of librarians and news researchers. These tools were often expensive and required specialized training to operate proprietary hardware and software. Today, lower costs for many services have combined with more user-friendly hardware and, especially, software. The result is a shift in searching. More reporters and their supervisors are doing their own searching, as data in Table 6 indicate. About double the proportion of reporters in 1997 (48.2%) were doing their own online searching compared to two years earlier.

3—Preferred Browser

A Web browser war has been fought within the computer industry for several years. Microsoft has refined its early versions of Internet Explorer and began to gain the attention of a growing portion of the browser market that is dominated by Netscape Navigator and the Communicator suite. In 1997, Navigator remained the world's dominant browser with 65% to 80% share, depending on which market research is cited. Those figures are reflected in newsrooms across the United States also. More than three-quarters (76.5%) of daily newspapers participating in the study used Navigator. As indicated in Table 7, Internet Explorer was a distant second with less than 10 percent of users.

4—Search Engines and Search Indices-Directories

Several mainstream search engines and search indices-directories receive wide use by journalists. AltaVista is the most popular search engine in daily newspaper newsrooms, listed by almost half (47.2%) of respondents as their first choice, as shown in Table 8. AltaVista, while not in the top four among Web search tools in 1997, has more than 60 gigabytes of information—about 30 million Web pages and four million Newsgroup messages indexed. The AltaVista network includes Europe, Latin America, Australia, and Asia (Lake, 1997).

Yahoo! is actually a search index or directory, but is often considered a search engine by respondents. It is also highly used (25.4%). Yahoo!, perhaps the most popular search tool, was rated second. Yahoo! offers several approaches to searching, but its categories are helpful for subject searching. Yahoo! has 14 main subject categories. Each is subdivided into even more sections. It also has national sites that focus on single countries and specific metropolitan areas in the United States.

5—Most Widely Used Web Sites

Of the tens of thousands of commercial, organizational, personal, and public / government Web sites available for journalists to use in gathering information, which ones tend to be most useful? Which are the most-used sites? The answer to both of these questions is government sites. In this case, both state and federal government sites are widely used. Data in Table 9 show that newspaper journalists use state and local government sites most often— almost one in four (23.9%) named them as a favorite sites— when they use the World Wide Web. Another government site, the U.S. Census site (www.census.gov), was named by 17.2% of users. Search engines and indices— Alta Vista (www.altavista.com) and Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com)— were next on the list, but two more federal government sites followed. The Securities and Exchange Commission site (www.sec.gov), called EDGAR, and the Federal Elections Commission site (www.fec.gov) that permits access to campaign contributions data were named by 6.0% and 4.5% respectively. While these figures may not seem dominating, they are important considering the thousands of government servers and other private sites that may be useful to journalists.

6—Qualities of Strong and Weak Web Sites

While there may be disagreement over the value of the World Wide Web to journalists, there are still concerns about what makes a Web site useful to newsgathering. Most of the issues seem to be the same ones journalists consider when dealing with information in other forms— such as the accuracy and availability of the information. Data in Table 10 show that journalists in 1997 were most concerned about finding valid and accurate information in Web sites. A total of 35.1% noted this when listing qualities of a Web site. However, finding information in a timely manner is also important. Another 20.2% listed easy access to the information, 11.9% listed searchable sites to help find information, and 10.7% noted that the overall response speed of the site server mattered. The ability to download data was also mentioned.

There are problems with sites that trouble journalists, also. Pointless graphics, which increase information transfer time, was most-often (27.5%) mentioned. Slow-loading pages was mentioned third (10.8%) as well. The quality of information surfaced as an issue. Sites with useless or bad content were named by 18.0%. Bad site organization, making it slow to find needed facts, was mentioned by 9.0% and the lack of attribution was named by another 7.2% of respondents. Content that was perceived to be too public relations-oriented was seen as another characteristic of poor quality sites and named by 7.2%.

7—Problems with Web Sites

Verification of information is the biggest problem that journalists feel that they face when using Web sites. Data in Table 11 show 19.6% of journalists named this problem first on their list. The ability to find the site quickly was mentioned by 16.7% of the respondents. The lack of reliable information was listed by 16.1% and questionable truthfulness of information was named by 11.3% of users. Accurate information that is out of date is still another Web problem, 10.1% of respondents noted.

8—Online Successes and Failures in Newsrooms

Journalists find the ability to conduct background research for a news story to be the most important (12.5%) success of using online research tools, as shown in Table 12. Locating difficult-to-find information is often cited (11.6%). Finding sources and gathering news quickly are widely credited for success with online research as well.

On the other side of the issue, journalists identify only one major failure with online research— not taking advantage of the resources (35.1%). While one in three responses listed this frustration, journalists also mentioned the fact that they were slow to learn to use online resources or did not receive enough training in their newsrooms. Similarly, they noted there were not enough resources in the newsroom to use them.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of networked information resources for newsgathering is still in its infancy. This is especially true when considering the Internet and World Wide Web. While certain commercial services have been available for as much as two decades— such as Nexis-Lexis— other online tools have been use for just a few years. Thus, understanding the use process and its effects of such resources is still evolving. The proportion of news organizations using these resources has been shown to be increasing. While adoption of the tools is almost 100%, the journalists are only beginning to gain experience with them.

Most journalists seem to be aware of the usefulness of the World Wide Web and the Internet. While it is now clearly a tool for background research, location of sources, locating story ideas, and confirmation of certain types of information, other uses have not yet been fully explored. As more and more newspapers develop online networks as distribution tools, these new methods of gathering and distributing information will emerge. One example is found in the use of public databases as information resources for news stories, but also as resources for readers on the newspapers' World Wide Web sites. This application has been explored at several major daily newspapers in 1996 and 1997 and may spread quickly in 1998.

There has been concurrent development of fear of the World Wide Web as an information resource. Because of the lack of control of information placed on Web sites, journalists are becoming more concerned about the usefulness of Web site information. This concern is similar to concern for accuracy and verification of content of any information that might arrive in their newsrooms by fax, mail, anonymous telephone call voice mail, or overnight delivery service.

It is interesting that there is still reluctance on the part of some journalists to recognize the value of online tools such as the World Wide Web. One quarter of respondent newspapers doubted the importance of the Web. At the same time, mastery of online resources, such as using the Web, was rated the highest computer skill priority for journalists in 1997.

Because of their dependence on public information, journalists are using online government resources as quickly as they become available. The main hurdle in this aspect of online research and newsgathering is government itself. Some local governments either lack the funding or the interest to make certain public records accessible for remote online users. There are also numerous local legal barriers that must be overcome.

Journalists must be critical of the online resources they use. It is apparent that many newsrooms view online resources in the same skeptical manner they view traditional documents and human sources. The desire for valid and accurate information is high, as is the identification of verification as the leading problem with Web-based information. The continued growth of online sources in newsgathering is dependent on access and training. Journalists also identify this as a major frustration with online in their own newsrooms. Each of the failures listed is connected to either access or training.

This study has established the current use patterns in newsrooms. Additional analysis and study of how the Internet, the World Wide Web, and commercial online services will be required for fuller understanding that descriptive analysis cannot achieve. The dynamic nature of the online world, especially the World Wide Web, will require regular study of how journalists use these tools and, perhaps, how their work habits change. Evolution on the Internet is occurring so rapidly that the findings reported in this study are rapidly becoming dated. There is no doubt of the potential impact that online sources have on journalism. However, regular monitoring and analysis are necessary to understand this impact on journalism.

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TABLE 1
GENERAL NEWSPAPER USE OF COMPUTERS

Category	1994	1995	1996	1997
Use computers in newsgathering	66%	70%	78%	88%
Use a CAR "desk"	47	43	39	44
CAR integrated throughout newsroom	--	--	30	32
Offer some type of CAR training	30	41	48	53
In-house training classes	--	22	28	44
Mean number of persons used for CAR	3.5	4.7	6.3	7.9

TABLE 2
NEWSPAPER USE OF ONLINE RESOURCES

Uses online in reporting	1994	1995	1996	1997	Percentage Change
Yes	57.2%	63.8%	80.7%	89.8%	+32.6%
No	39.9	33.4	19.3	7.5	- 32.4
Missing	2.9	2.8	0.0	2.7	- 0.2
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

TABLE 3
REASONS FOR NOT USING ONLINE RESOURCES

Reason	1994 n = 58	1995 n = 62	1996 n = 31	1997 n = 11	Percentage Change
No hardware/software	27.6%	22.6%	32.3%	36.4%	+8.8%
No expertise	8.6	6.5	6.5	18.2	+9.6
Just starting	10.3	24.2	19.4	18.2	+ 7.9
No interest	6.9	1.6	3.2	9.1	+2.2
Money or budget	25.9	12.9	16.1	9.1	-16.8
Use other service	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1	+ 9.1
Not yet online	13.8	22.6	19.4	0.0	-13.8
Dragging feet	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	- 1.6
Not high priority	6.9	8.1	3.2	0.0	-6.9
Totals	100.0%	100.1%	100.1%	100.0%	

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF USE OF ONLINE RESOURCES

Frequency	1994	1995	1996	1997	Percentage Change
Daily, more often	27.4%	28.9%	36.9%	51.8%	+24.4%
Weekly, more often	12.1	22.0	25.8	28.8	+16.7
Monthly, more often	3.6	9.8	12.9	4.9	+ 1.3
Less than monthly	1.4	5.8	4.3	7.1	+ 5.7
Missing / never used	38.9	33.8	20.2	5.3	- 33.6
Other	17.3	----	----	----	----
Totals	100.7%	100.3%	100.1%	100.0%	

TABLE 5
LEADING ONLINE RESOURCES IN NEWSROOMS

Service	1994	1995	1996	1997	Percentage Change
Internet / WWW	25.0%	44.6%	66.5%	91.6%	+66.6%
America Online	17.3	38.0	47.2	42.5	+25.2
Local govt. online	-----	27.2	28.3	46.0	+18.8*
PACER	-----	19.5	23.2	27.4	+7.9*
DataTimes	14.9	26.8	24.5	19.9	+5.0
Westlaw	0.0	1.7	3.4	3.5	+3.5
FedWorld	-----	19.9	20.6	19.9	0.0*
Datalink	1.0	1.0	2.1	0.9	-0.1
Information America	-----	3.8	4.7	3.1	-0.7*
Lexis / Nexis	28.8	28.2	28.8	25.7	-3.1
CompuServe	38.0	39.4	41.6	26.5	-11.5

* Percent change from 1995 to 1997 only.

TABLE 6
INDIVIDUALS CONDUCTING ONLINE RESEARCH

Position/title of person	1995	1996	1997	Percentage Change 1995-97
Reporter	23.5%	31.8%	48.2%	+24.7%
Librarian/researcher	25.3	17.2	15.5	-9.8
Anyone in newsroom	22.6	22.3	21.7	-0.9
Editor	3.6	4.3	2.7	-0.9
None/missing	14.5	21.0	11.1	-3.4
Other	10.4	3.4	0.9	-9.5
Totals	99.9%	100.0%	100.1%	

TABLE 7
WORLD WIDE WEB BROWSER SOFTWARE IN NEWSROOMS

Browser	1997
Netscape Navigator	76.5%
Microsoft Internet Explorer	7.5
America Online browser	4.4
Other	0.4
Missing	11.1

n = 226

TABLE 8
SEARCH ENGINES AND INDICES IN NEWSROOMS

Search engine	1997
AltaVista	47.2%
Yahoo!	25.4
Lycos	5.1
InfoSeek	5.1
Excite	4.6
Webcrawler	4.6
HotBot	2.0
Other	6.1

n = 197

TABLE 9
FAVORITE WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

Web site	1997
State government sites	23.9%
U.S. Census	17.2
AltaVista	13.4
Yahoo!	11.9
SEC Edgar	6.0
Federal Election Commission	4.5
Switchboard	3.0
FedWorld	2.2
Lycos	2.2
Various newspaper sites	2.2

(Note: First-listed responses only, n = 134)

TABLE 10
CHARACTERISTICS OF WEB SITES

Characteristics	1997
STRONG WEB SITES	
Valid, accurate information	35.1%
Easy access to information	20.2
Searchable	11.9
Speed	10.7
Downloadable delimited data	5.4
Clean page layout	4.8
Reputable source	3.6
Minimum graphics	2.4
Other	6.0
WEAK WEB SITES	
Pointless graphics	27.5%
Useless or bad content	18.0
Slow to load	10.8
Bad site organization	9.0
No attribution	7.2
PR-oriented content	7.2
Not searchable	5.4
Inaccurate information	4.8
Hard to find	3.0
Other	7.1

n = 168 for strong Web sites responses and n = 167 for weak Web sites responses

TABLE 11
PROBLEMS OF WEB SITES AS NEWS SOURCES

Problems	1997
Verification	19.6%
Slow to find the site	16.7
Unreliable	16.1
Truthfulness	11.3
Outdated	10.1
Badly sourced	4.2
Server down	3.6
Broad categories	3.6
Bad content	3.6
Other	11.2

(Note: First-choice responses only, n = 168)

TABLE 12
ONLINE USE SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Category	1997
SUCCESSES	
Background	12.5%
Finding difficult-to-find facts	11.6
Finding sources	9.8
Getting news fast	8.9
Extending government coverage	8.0
Added depth, context	7.1
FAILURES	
Not taking advantage of online	35.1%
Slow to learn to use online	8.8
Not enough training for use	8.8
Not enough resources to use	8.8
Time wasted, money wasted	5.3
Lack of access	5.3
Some staff members not motivated	5.3

n = 112 for successes and n = 114 for failures

'POWERFUL' ATTRIBUTIVE VERBS AND 'BODY-LANGUAGE' STATEMENTS REVISITED

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ABSTRACT

'Powerful' Attributive Verbs and 'Body-Language' Statements Revisited

This paper reports the results of an experiment to determine the impact of "stronger" attributive verbs than "said" ("insisted," "contended," "exclaimed") and "body-language" statements ("waving a stack of petitions," "pounding her fist on the table") on the readers of news stories. The study was modeled after earlier research by Cole and Shaw. The experiment found some support for hypotheses that stronger verbs and body-language statements increase readers' affective responses to news events and news sources.

'Powerful' Attributive Verbs and 'Body-Language' Statements Revisited

Journalism students who take beginning writing and reporting classes learn early that their instructors want them to use the verb "said" when attributing information to news sources. Journalists consider "said" to be a neutral word that will not influence readers' or viewers' impressions of the person to whom the statements are attributed. A writing guide published by The Associated Press devotes a chapter to "attributive verbs and loaded words." It makes this recommendation: "Among attributive verbs, *said* usually says it best. It's short, clear, neutral, and unfailingly accurate, a verb for all seasons. You'll need substitutes occasionally to avoid monotony, but be careful; they are not synonyms of *said*" (Cappon 1991, 73). The use of "said" has become so much a part of American journalism that reporters, particularly those who work for newspapers, use few other attributive verbs.

In contrast to this, journalism instructors and newspaper editors sometimes encourage reporters to use "body-language" statements — "attempts to help readers visualize an event through descriptive details" (Cole and Shaw 1974, 62). Reporters use these types of details most often in feature writing. For example, "a phrase telling how smoke curled up from the cigarette in the interviewee's hand, or perhaps how he tapped his left foot incessantly, conveys a distinct image in addition to what the interviewee says" (Cole and Shaw 1974, 62). One journalism textbook says: "Journalists reveal character by using quotations and describing speech patterns, mannerisms, body language, appearance, dress, age, preferences, prejudices, use of personal space, and a host of other traits. Reporters can sprinkle touches of these descriptions throughout a story to show what the subject of an interview is like" (Fedler, Bender, Davenport and Kostyu 1997, 445). Another textbook includes these two points among ten guidelines for news writing: "Show, don't tell" and "Avoid judgments and inferences. Let the facts talk" (Mencher 1991, 167). In other words, reporters learn not to make outright judgments about people in their stories, but to let readers make their own judgments based on the details reporters provide. While this principle may sound easy to follow, reporters do exercise judgments by deciding what facts and details to report. The body-language statements they include in their news stories may influence the public's perceptions about the people they have described.

This study analyzed whether readers responded differently to a news story that used "said" as the only attributive verb than they did to versions of the same news story that contained "stronger" attributive verbs and body-language statements. Stronger verbs included the use of "exclaimed," "contended," and similar words for attributing comments to the primary person quoted in the story. This study was modeled after an earlier one done by Richard R. Cole and Donald Lewis Shaw (1974).

The study presented here had two purposes. The first was to determine whether journalists are correct in their assumptions about the use of strong attributive verbs and body-language statements. The second, and perhaps more important, purpose was to examine the impact journalistic writing has on readers' perceptions about people and events in the news. The media have become the public's primary source of information about local, state, national, and world events. Because of this, journalism and communication scholars, as well as sociolinguistics, have studied whether the language used in news stories influences the way people look at these events.

Literature review

Several researchers have conducted studies relating the fields of linguistics and print journalism, specifically newspapers and news magazines.

Cole and Shaw

In their experiment, Cole and Shaw (1974) took three news stories from out-of-state metropolitan dailies. One story was based on a speech, one on an interview, and one on a panel discussion. The researchers then created three versions of each of the articles — Version 1 used "said" for attribution, Version 2 used stronger verbs, and Version 3 used stronger verbs and body-language statements (63).

One hundred and fifty-five students in an introduction to mass communication class read three news stories, one a Version 1, one a Version 2, and one a Version 3, but of different news stories. For example, a student might have read Version 1 of the speech story, Version 2 or the interview story, and Version 3 of the panel discussion story; another student might have read Version 1 of the interview story, Version 2 of the panel discussion story, and Version 3 of the speech story. After they read the articles, students were asked to evaluate both the stories and people quoted in the stories on seven-point semantic differential scales (Cole and Shaw 1974, 63).

A one-way analysis of variance revealed statistically significant (p of .05 or less) results for three of the eight sets of adjectives used for evaluating the news story itself. Of these three, students evaluated the Version 1 stories as more believable and objective than the Version 2 and Version 3 stories, but they evaluated the Version 3 stories as more excitable than the Version 1 and Version 2 stories. The one-way analysis of variance also revealed statistically significant (p of .05 or less) results for two of the seven sets of adjectives used for evaluating the people quoted in the stories. Students rated the people quoted in the Version 3 stories as more rash and more free (as opposed to constrained) than the people quoted in the Version 1 and Version 2 stories (1974, 64-66).

The researchers drew these conclusions from their study: "Findings ... suggest that more active (more powerful than 'said') attributive verbs, especially with 'body-language' statements, caused the students to view entire news stories with suspicion, especially students who reported being frequent readers of newspaper news. This supports the preponderance of textbook advice that 'said' usually is the safest attributive verb. The findings suggest that 'body-language' statements — while they may clearly brighten a story — may also decrease its believability and objectivity" (Cole and Shaw 1974, 66).

Merrill

John Merrill (1965) conducted another study that looked at whether Time magazine stereotyped three presidents through biased content in its news stories. Merrill randomly selected ten consecutive issues of Time published during the presidencies of Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and John Kennedy. Six categories of bias were established: attribution bias, adjective bias, adverbial bias, contextual bias, outright opinion, and photographic bias; instances of bias were rated as either "positive" or "negative" (Merrill 1965, 563, 564).

His attribution-bias analysis relates most closely to this study because it focused on what verbs besides "said" Time used in attributing information to the presidents. Merrill provided these examples of the attribution: Truman — "said curtly," "barked Harry S. Truman," "preached the Truman sermon," and "publicly put his foot in his mouth"; Eisenhower — "said with a happy grin," "chatted amiably," "cautiously pointed out," and "said warmly"; and Kennedy — "concluded the president," "stated the case in plain terms," "Kennedy insisted," and "the president promised" (Merrill 1965, 568). Based on the results for all categories of bias, Merrill concluded that Time was anti-Truman, pro-Eisenhower, and neutral or moderate toward Kennedy (1965, 570).

Geis

In another study involving news coverage of politicians, Michael L. Geis (1987) examined the verbs Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report used in reporting the speech of Walter Mondale and Ronald Reagan during ten weeks of the 1984 presidential campaign, from June 18 to August 27. He also looked at the attributive verbs used in United Press International stories from March, April, and May 1985 that covered the activities of President Reagan and Democratic and Republican members of Congress (124-125).

Using the attributive verbs in the news magazine and UPI stories, Geis constructed sentence schemata such as "Joe Jones acknowledged that such-and-such" and "Joe Jones accused them of such-and-such." (1987, 128). Undergraduate students evaluated 133 sentence schemata on five, five-point semantic differential scales: inaccurate-accurate, rash-cautious, unsuccessful-successful, weak-strong, and excitable-calm. Based on their evaluations, Geis classified the attributive verbs as having a positive or negative affect — putting the subject in a good or bad light. The most positive verbs included "detail," "advise," "reaffirm," "inform," and "assure." The most negative verbs included "slash," "plead," "crack," "blame," and "taunt" (1987, 129, 130). From the study, Geis concluded "that politicians running for office use stronger language than do politicians in the normal course of political activity. As a consequence, they appear to be relatively less calm and cautious and relatively more successful and strong than is normal for politicians generally" (1987, 140).

Other print journalism-linguistics studies

Lewis Donohew (1981, 1982) compared the impact of writing styles in the New York Times (traditional style — summary lead featuring most important points, followed by other factual information in descending order of importance) and Newsweek (narrative style — more chronologically ordered style). He found that "overall mean physiological arousal was greater and affective response more positive ... on narrative style than on traditional style, on action verbs and adjectives than on passive ones, and on direct quotations than on paraphrased statements" (1981, 114). Previous research by Donohew, Philip Palmgren, and Jack Duncan (1980) had shown that arousal was associated with readers' decisions to stop or continue reading newspaper stories, regardless of whether the readers agreed or disagreed with the views expressed in the stories. These studies suggest that strong verbs and body-language statements may have the same impact as action verbs and adjectives and encourage people to read larger portions of news stories.

Donald L. Fry and Stuart J. Sigman (1984, 2) looked at transactive (causal) and non-transactive (non-causal) clauses in articles carried by two London daily newspapers in 1977 following violence and rioting during an annual summer carnival in London. Earlier research by Tony Trew had indicated that these articles reported the events in linguistically different fashions (Trew 1979, 154). Fry and Sigman had 204 students in an advanced communication course read and evaluate the two news stories. They found statistically significant differences in the perceptions of readers about the activity level of groups involved in the violence, which coincided with the causal transactions in the articles. The researchers concluded that the way a reporter structures information in articles influences how readers interpret what has occurred, particularly if the readers have only limited or no prior experience with the particular event (Fry and Sigman 1984, 4, 7, 10).

A study by Lisbeth Lapari (1996) suggests that journalists' use of stance adverbs — such as "obviously," "clearly," "apparently," and "presumably" — "can augment or diminish the legitimacy of knowledge claims, masquerade as evidence, and steer readers toward a preferred interpretation of the news" (821). This study adds to the literature suggesting that journalists' language use influences readers' perceptions about news events and sources.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study were similar to those used by Cole and Shaw (1974, 62):

1. A news story using stronger attributive verbs than "said" will result in a greater affective (emotional) response in story evaluation by readers.

2. A news story using body-language statements also will result in a greater affective response in story evaluation by readers.

3. Readers' judgments of a person quoted in a news story will result in a greater affective response when verbs more powerful than "said" are used.

4. Readers' judgments of a person quoted in a news story also will result in a greater affective response when body language statements are used.

Examples of strong attributive verbs are "contended," "emphasized," and "insisted." Examples of "body-language statements" are "waving a stack of petitions" and "pounding her fist on the table."

Methodology

The procedures used in this study were similar to those used by Cole and Shaw, although the process was simplified to shorten the amount of time needed for respondents to read a news story and complete a survey about it. The news story used was developed from an article in The Plain Dealer, a daily newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio. It concerned efforts by a group of older residents to lower bus fares charged to children in Cleveland. A newspaper unfamiliar to most respondents was used so they would not have prior knowledge about the people quoted and the topics covered. This particular article was used because it was easily adapted to include body-language statements and stronger attributive verbs than "said."

The story from The Plain Dealer was shortened and edited to fit the specific needs of the study. The names of some people and groups were changed, and additional comments were attributed to "Mary Roberts," the spokeswoman for the Grandparents United group and the primary person quoted in the news story.

Three versions of the news story then were created. Version 1 used "said" exclusively for attribution and contained no body-language statements. "Said" was used eleven times to attribute statements to Roberts and three times to attribute statements to other people; "asked" was used once with a question posed by another person quoted in the story. In Cole and Shaw's study, two of their Version 1 stories had fourteen attributive verbs each, and the other had five (1974, 63).

Many of the comments made by people besides Roberts in the original news story were retained to preserve the authenticity of the story used in the experiment. Reporters attempt to present all sides of an issue in their stories, and eliminating the counter comments made by Regional Transit Authority officials would have made the story seem less realistic.

Version 2 of the story used stronger verbs than "said" in attributing information to Roberts, but it contained no body-language statements. The verbs included "contended," "stressed," and "emphasized"; these active verbs were used eleven times. Instances of "said" and "asked" used in Version 1 to attribute comments to others besides Roberts were retained in Version 2.

Version 3 of the story used the same strong verbs as in Version 2 and also contained three body-language statements to describe Roberts' actions. The statements were: "waving a stack of petitions," "pounded her fist against the table," and "shaking her head in disagreement." In Cole and Shaw's study, two body-language statements were added to the speech and interview stories, while three were added to the panel discussion story (1974, 63). Again, the study presented here retained the use of "said" and "asked" for attributing comments to others besides Roberts in Version 3. (For copies of each version of the story, see the appendix.)

The data for the study were gathered by having ninety-four students in an introduction to mass communication class at a large Midwestern university read one version of the news story and evaluate both the story and a person quoted in the story through the use of seven-point semantic differential scales. The scales were used to measure the affective responses of the participants. The students participated in the study at the beginning of one of their regular class periods. They read only one news story, instead of three as in Cole and Shaw's study, to reduce the amount of time required to complete the task. The students were instructed to read the story at their normal speed and then to record their impressions of the story and of Mary Roberts.

The participants were assigned at random to read a particular version of the news story; thirty-two read Version 1, thirty-three read Version 2, and twenty-nine read Version 3. Sixty-two respondents were females, while thirty-two were males. Eighty-nine were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, and five were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four. Forty-five were freshmen, thirty-one sophomores, seventeen juniors, and one a graduate student. Fifty-three were journalism or communication majors, twenty-eight had other majors, and thirteen were undecided on a major. The students also were asked questions about journalism courses they had taken in college, high school journalism experience, other journalism experience, their readership of a daily newspaper, and their viewership of television news.

The students then rated the news stories using semantic differential scales for eight pairs of adjectives. Cole and Shaw used the same sets of adjectives. Three of the sets came from Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci, and Percy H. Tannenbaum, who proposed that three major judgmental dimensions — evaluation, potency, and activity — of semantic "space" "reappeared in a wide variety of judgmental situations" (1957, 325). "One set of adjectives (excitable-calm) came from their activity dimension, which is concerned with quickness, excitement, warmth, [and] agitation. Two other adjective sets (complete-incomplete and timely-untimely) came from their evaluative dimension, which in general terms concerns a 'good' versus 'bad' factor" (Cole and Shaw 1974, 64). Cole and Shaw developed the other five sets of adjectives (believable-unbelievable, bright-dull, accurate-inaccurate, clear-unclear, and objective-subjective) because they "reflect judgmental dimensions journalists regard as important" (Cole and Shaw 1974, 64).

Participants in the study presented here also rated Mary Roberts by using seven pairs of adjectives that came from Osgood et al. The successful-unsuccessful, grateful-ungrateful, and happy-sad pairs came from their evaluative dimension; fast-slow and rash-cautious from their activity dimension; and strong-weak and constrained-free from their potency dimension, which covers such judgments as size and toughness (Cole and Shaw 1974, 64, 65). (For a copy of the evaluation form, see the appendix.)

Results

The overall results of this study showed more statistically significant differences in the adjective pairs evaluating Mary Roberts than in the adjective pairs evaluating the news story itself. (See Table 1 in the appendix.)

Results evaluating news story

Of the eight sets of adjectives evaluating the news story itself, the one-way analysis of variance showed significance for only one set, excitable-calm. This set of adjectives had a p value of .0456. Version 3 was rated the most excitable with a mean of 3.6207, followed by Version 2 with a mean of 3.1818, and Version 1 with a mean of 2.6563.

Separate t-tests for excitable-calm showed statistically significant differences between Versions 1 and 3 (p=.014) and between Version 1 and a combination of Versions 2 and 3 (p=.024). The differences between Versions 1 and 2 and between Versions 2 and 3 were not significant.

Even though the differences for the seven other sets of adjectives evaluating the news story were not statistically significant, some of the trends followed predictions. For example, Version 3 was judged to be the most bright, and Version 1 was judged to be the most complete and the most objective. Other trends did not follow predictions, however. Version 2 was judged to be the most believable, the most accurate, and the most clear. Version 3 was judged to be the most timely. The mean scores for many of these sets of adjectives were so close that definite trends could not be determined.

Cole and Shaw's study found significant differences between three of the eight sets of adjectives evaluating the news stories — believable-unbelievable, excitable-calm, and objective-subjective.

Results evaluating person quoted in news story

Of the seven sets of adjectives evaluating Roberts, a one-way analysis of variance looking at differences in the mean scores for the three versions showed statistically significant results for four sets — successful-unsuccessful, fast-slow, rash-cautious, and strong-weak.

Participants reading Version 2 judged Roberts to be the most successful, followed by the readers of Version 3. Separate t-tests showed significant differences between Versions 1 and 2 (p=.006), between Versions 1 and 3 (p=.028), and between Version 1 and a combination of Versions 2 and 3 (p=.004). There was no significant difference between Versions 2 and 3.

Readers of Version 3 rated Roberts as the most fast. Separate t-tests showed significant differences between Versions 1 and 3 (p=.006) and between Version 1 and a combination of Versions 2 and 3 (p=.011), but not between Versions 1 and 2 or between Versions 2 and 3.

Participants reading Version 3 also rated Roberts as the most rash. Here, t-tests showed significant differences between Versions 1 and 3 (p=.004), between Versions 2 and 3 (p=.013), and between Version 1 and a combination of Versions 2 and 3 (p=.049). The difference between Versions 1 and 2 was not significant.

In the final set of adjectives showing significance, readers of Version 3 rated Roberts as the most strong. Separate t-tests showed significant differences between Versions 1 and 3 (p=.019) and between Versions 2 and 3 (p=.031), but not between Versions 1 and 2 and between Version 1 and a combination of Versions 2 and 3.

For the three non-significant sets of adjectives evaluating Roberts, readers of Version 2 rated her the most grateful and the most happy, while readers of Version 1 rated her the most constrained.

Cole and Shaw's study found significant differences for only two of the sets of adjectives evaluating people quoted in their news stories — rash-cautious and constrained-free.

Other findings

Other statistical tests were done to determine whether the results were influenced by participants' gender, their media experience, their newspaper readership habits, and their television viewing habits. Gender did not seem to influence any of the evaluations, while media experience, newspaper readership habits, and television viewership habits each seemed to exert a significant influence on one set of evaluations.

Further analysis using two-way analysis of variance, and looking at both gender and version of the story, found significant results for excitable-calm, successful-unsuccessful, fast-slow, rash-cautious, and strong-weak. These were the same sets of adjectives attaining significance in the one-way analysis of variance that looked only at variations across versions. Gender, therefore, did not appear to have any influence on the differences found.

Several background questions asked respondents about journalism courses taken in college, formal journalism training in high school, media experience in high school (newspapers, yearbooks, radio, television, magazines, and other media), and experience with non-high school media. An index of media experience was formed by adding together "yes" answers to these questions. The index could have ranged from zero to thirteen, but the actual scores ranged from zero to seven, with a mean score of 2.226. Respondents then were divided into two groups. Those with scores of zero to two were classified as having low media experience (n=55), and those with scores of three to seven were classified as having high media experience (n=37).

The only set of adjectives where media experience produced significant results, which were not related to the version of the story, was bright-dull. Those with less media experience rated Versions 2 and 3 as being more bright than did those with more media experience. These results support the idea that those with more media experience may be more skeptical about news stories using powerful attributive verbs and body-language statements.

Respondents also were classified into groups with low and high readership of daily newspapers. Those reading newspapers zero to four times a week were placed in the low group (n=35) and those reading newspapers five to seven times a week in the high group (n=59). The bright-dull set of adjectives showed the same effect here as with the media-experience index. Bright-dull was the only set of adjectives where newspaper readership habits seemed to influence the evaluations strongly. Of those reading Version 1, those who read newspapers more often rated the version as being far more bright (mean of 3.76) than did those who read newspapers less often (mean of 2.43).

In a final analysis, respondents were placed into groups with low and high viewership of television news. Those watching television news zero to four times a week were placed in the low category (n=49), and those watching five to seven times a week were placed in the high category (n=45). The only set of adjectives where television viewership habits seemed to influence respondents' evaluations was the strong-weak set concerning Mary Roberts. Those in the low-viewership category, for all three versions, rated Roberts as being stronger than did those in the high-viewership category.

Discussion and conclusions

Support for the hypotheses was mixed. Hypotheses 3 and 4, predicting that powerful attributive verbs and body-language statements would result in greater affective evaluations of a person quoted in a news story, received the most support. This study found significant differences for four of the seven sets of adjectives evaluating Mary Roberts (successful-unsuccessful, fast-slow, rash-cautious, and strong-weak), while Cole and Shaw found significant results for only two sets of adjectives (rash-cautious and constrained-free).

Differences in the way this study and Cole and Shaw's study were conducted may account for the varying findings. In Cole and Shaw's study, respondents read three news stories — one based on a speech, one based on an interview, and one based on a panel discussion. In the panel discussion story, only the person who appeared most prominently in the story was evaluated by respondents (1974, 64). In contrast, respondents in this study read only one story, which outlined a conflict between a Cleveland senior citizens organization and the Regional Transit Authority board. Mary Roberts, president of the senior citizens group, figured prominently in all three versions of the news story, which may have accounted for the strong evaluations she received.

The evaluations of only one set of adjectives for the entire news story (excitable-calm) were significant in this study, although some other results were in the predicted direction. Overall, the evaluations of the news story itself did not support Hypotheses 1 and 2, which predicted greater affective evaluations of versions of stories containing powerful verbs and "body-language" statements. Cole and Shaw's study supported these hypotheses somewhat more, with significance found for three sets of adjectives (believable-unbelievable, excitable-calm, and objective-subjective).

Cole and Shaw wrote that they evaluated readers' reactions to stories and people quoted in the stories separately because "readers might use two sets of judgmental dimensions in evaluating the story and the person quoted" (1974, 63). Indeed, that appeared to be the case in the study presented here. Respondents seemed to respond more to the impression of Mary Roberts given in the news story than to the story itself. Again, this may have occurred because comments from Roberts dominated the story.

Respondents in this study also may have hesitated to rate the news story as believable, accurate, timely, and objective because they had nothing to judge it against. One respondent did not evaluate the accurate-inaccurate category, and wrote a note that she had no way of knowing how accurate it was because she had no facts other than those presented. Perhaps telling the respondents prior to the experiment that the news story had appeared in a Cleveland newspaper on a specific date would have made the story seem more realistic. In actuality, respondents received no information about whether the news story was real, and they might have questioned its authenticity.

One issue that could be explored further in a study of this type is whether journalistic training affects the way respondents evaluate the news stories. Cole and Shaw excluded students with journalism training from their study (1974, 63). This study attempted to look at differences between those with low and high amounts of media experience, but found significant differences only for the bright-dull evaluation. Even though quite a few of the respondents had high school journalism experience and/or had journalism classes in high school, only eight had taken a college reporting class.

Implications for journalists and sociolinguists

The results of this research have implications for both journalists and sociolinguists.

One purpose of the study was to determine whether journalists are correct in their beliefs that powerful attributive verbs decrease the objectivity of news stories and that body-language statements brighten news stories. The results did not show strong support for the predicted impact of stronger verbs on objectivity, but the results did demonstrate that powerful verbs and body-language statements influenced readers' perceptions of Mary Roberts. If these two things cause readers to view those quoted as more successful, fast, rash, and strong, many journalists would interpret this as a negative influence on the neutrality of their news stories. Body-language statements did result in respondents evaluating Version 3 of the news story as the most excitable, but journalists must weigh this effect against the negative impact just discussed.

Even though the results of this study differed somewhat from Cole and Shaw's results, their summary of the challenge facing journalists still holds true: "These findings suggest that if you write with a number of 'strong' attributive verbs, adding a sprinkling of 'body-language' statements, readers may find your stories bright and exciting. *But* they may also judge your stories as less believable, accurate, clear, or objective. Across these horns may sometimes stretch a dilemma for the reporter intent on effective communication" (1974, 66).

The traditional values of objectivity and accuracy still prevail at America's newspapers and in journalism education. This is not likely to change anytime soon, especially when the traditional beliefs are reinforced, at least to some extent, by studies such as this. For some time to come, journalism professors will likely tell their students to use "said" for attribution and to use body-language statements with care.

The second purpose of this study was to examine the impact journalistic writing has on the public's perceptions about people and events in the news. This study and others looking at language and news coverage indicate that journalists have power to influence people's views of the world through the way they put words together. Other factors, such as people's experiences, obviously affect their outlook on news events, but the media have a definite impact.

Sociolinguistic research can be particularly helpful in examining aspects of journalistic writing that mass communication researchers may not consider. In their research, Fry and Sigman suggested the need to look at a text as a whole, and "not as a fractionalized set of information bits. By making apparent the structural characteristics of newspaper articles, we will be better able to understand the impact these articles have on the readers' perceptions of the world as mediated through newspapers" (1984, 10). Studies such as this provide information about only two aspects of journalistic writing — attributive verbs and body-language statements — but taken together with other linguistic studies of the media, they can help work toward the type of understanding described by Fry and Sigman.

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APPENDIX

Copies of three versions of news stories used in experiment

Copy of evaluation sheet used in experiment

Table 1: One-way analysis of variance results

Group seeks to lower fares for children on city buses

CLEVELAND — Lifelong Cleveland resident Mary Roberts and a group called Grandparents United want the city to lower bus fares charged to children.

"The kids should have the same privileges as the handicapped and the older people," said Roberts, the group's president. "I feel all the kids should be able to go downtown and see all the beautiful things there."

Roberts said Monday that she hopes to collect several thousand signatures on petitions to convince the Regional Transit Authority board to reduce bus fares to 35 cents for children age 6 to 17.

Student fares are now 75 cents for riding to and from school. Children pay the full adult fares — $1 for local trips and $1.25 for express trips — when they ride elsewhere. Fares for the disabled and those over age 65 are 60 cents for local trips and 75 cents for express trips.

The RTA board plans to discuss increasing the student rate and developing a discounted student pass this week. The board increased other rates last month but decided not to change student fares until fall so it could develop plans for a discount pass.

Roberts, who so far has collected 400 signatures on petitions, plans to seek the Cleveland School Board's support for her project.

"The school district is spending $2.2 million on RTA bus transportation, and anything it could do to reduce fares would help," Roberts said.

The school district now pays 60 of the 75 cents for students' school travel.

A primary problem faced by youngsters in the Cleveland schools is that 63 percent of them are on welfare, Roberts said.

"This is a little sickening," she said. "We have all these people hurting so much and running out of money before the end of the month. These are real people, not some statistics."

The RTA board needs to do more than just review what fares to increase to meet its budget, Roberts said.

"The board also needs to look at the people who pay those fares. Providing transportation to children at a price they can afford should be a top priority," she said.

Members of Grandparents United have said that reducing fares for children would result in more youngsters riding the buses, thus increasing revenue for the RTA, Roberts said.

Michael York, an RTA planner, said that if fares were reduced to 35 cents for children, RTA would lose between $3 million and $5 million per year. It also would gain an estimated 740,000 to 1.6 million riders because of the lower fare, he said.

Many RTA board members disagree with Roberts' recommendation to cut fares. In fact, the board has discussed increasing student fares to 90 cents to help meet the agency's $173 million budget.

Marjorie Wright, an RTA board member, said reducing the student rate to 35 cents would not be possible. "We cannot afford that," she said.

RTA board member Thomas Coyne voted against the recent increases in fares charged to adults and asked why Roberts' group hadn't expressed opposition to those rate hikes at public hearings.

Roberts said members of Grandparents United did speak out against all rate hikes when they were first proposed.

But, now that the fares for adults have gone up, the group is concentrating its efforts on lowering the fares for children, Roberts said.

"Most cities offer lower bus fares for children, and we think Cleveland should, too," Roberts said. "It's the least we can do for the future leaders of our city."

Version 1

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"The kids should have the same privileges as the handicapped and the older people," contended Roberts, the group's president. "I feel all the kids should be able to go downtown and see all the beautiful things there."

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"This is a little sickening!" she exclaimed. "We have all these people hurting so much and running out of money before the end of the month. These are real people, not some statistics."

The RTA board needs to do more than just review what fares to increase to meet its budget, Roberts insisted.

"The board also needs to look at the people who pay those fares," she charged. "Providing transportation to children at a price they can afford should be a top priority."

Members of Grandparents United have said that reducing fares for children would result in more youngsters riding the buses, thus increasing revenue for the RTA, Roberts argued.

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Roberts insisted that members of Grandparents United did speak out against all rate hikes when they were first proposed.

But, now that the fares for adults have gone up, the group is concentrating its efforts on lowering the fares for children, Roberts stressed.

"Most cities offer lower bus fares for children, and we think Cleveland should, too," Roberts emphasized. "It's the least we can do for the future leaders of our city."

Version 2

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"The kids should have the same privileges as the handicapped and the older people," contended Roberts, the group's president. "I feel all the kids should be able to go downtown and see all the beautiful things there."

Waving a stack of petitions, Roberts stressed Monday that she hopes to collect several thousand signatures to convince the Regional Transit Authority board to reduce bus fares to 35 cents for children age 6 to 17.

Student fares are now 75 cents for riding to and from school. Children pay the full adult fares — $1 for local trips and $1.25 for express trips — when they ride elsewhere. Fares for the disabled and those over age 65 are 60 cents for local trips and 75 cents for express trips.

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The school district now pays 60 of the 75 cents for students' school travel.

A primary problem faced by youngsters in the Cleveland schools is that 63 percent of them are on welfare, Roberts emphasized, as she pounded her fist against the table.

"This is a little sickening!" she exclaimed. "We have all these people hurting so much and running out of money before the end of the month. These are real people, not some statistics."

The RTA board needs to do more than just review what fares to increase to meet its budget, Roberts insisted.

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Shaking her head in disagreement with Coyne, Roberts insisted that members of Grandparents United did speak out against all rate hikes when they were first proposed.

But, now that the fares for adults have gone up, the group is concentrating its efforts on lowering the fares for children, Roberts stressed.

"Most cities offer lower bus fares for children, and we think Cleveland should, too," Roberts emphasized. "It's the least we can do for the future leaders of our city."

Version 3

Please evaluate the news story you just read using the following sets of words. Seven blanks are between each pair of words; check only one blank for each pair of words. The middle blank represents a neutral evaluation; the other blanks represent varying degrees of evaluation toward either word used in the set. Example:

good ___ : ___ : _x_ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ bad
(This indicates a "slightly good" evaluation.)

1. believable ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ unbelievable

2. bright ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ dull

3. complete ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ incomplete

4. accurate ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ inaccurate

5. excitable ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ calm

6. clear ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ unclear

7. timely ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ untimely

8. objective ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ subjective

Please evaluate your impressions of Mary Roberts, the woman proposing that bus fares for children be lowered, using the following pairs of words. Use the same procedures as you did above.

9. successful ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ unsuccessful

10. grateful ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ ungrateful

11. happy ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ sad

12. fast ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ slow

13. rash ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ cautious

14. strong ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ weak

15. constrained ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ free

TABLE 1
One-way analysis of variance results

These data are based on an experiment that used ninety-four students in an introduction to mass communication class. Students were assigned at random to read one of three versions of a news story. Version 1 used "said" for attribution, Version 2 used "stronger" attributive verbs than "said," and Version 3 used "stronger" attributive verbs and "body-language" statements. The adjectives below were used in seven-point semantic differential scales for evaluating the news story and a person quoted in the story; 4 was a neutral value. The highest possible value was 7 for the first word, and the lowest possible value was1 for the second word.

Adjectives rating story:	Means of Version 1 (n=32)	Means of Version 2 (n=33)	Means of Version 3 (n=29)	F Score	P
believable-unbelievable	5.2813	5.3636	5.2069	0.1119	.8942
bright-dull	3.1563	3.6061	3.7586	1.6558	.1966
complete-incomplete	4.9688	4.8485	4.5517	0.6777	.5103
accurate-inaccurate	4.7742	5.2121	4.8621	1.2076	.3037
excitable-calm	2.6563	3.1818	3.6207	3.1939	*.0456
clear-unclear	4.3438	4.9091	4.8621	1.3485	.2648
timely-untimely	4.3750	4.5455	4.7931	0.8926	.4132
objective-subjective	4.5625	4.1875	4.5517	0.8085	.4487
Adjectives rating person:					
Evaluative					
successful-unsuccessful	3.4688	4.3636	4.2069	4.4257	*.0146
grateful-ungrateful	3.9375	4.2121	3.8276	0.6714	.5135
happy-sad	3.7188	3.8788	3.4138	0.9873	.3765
Activity					
fast-slow	3.9063	4.3939	4.7931	4.0535	*.0206
rash-cautious	4.2188	4.3333	5.0000	5.0284	*.0085
Potency					
strong-weak	4.8438	4.9091	5.6207	3.4370	*.0364
constrained-free	3.6250	3.3030	3.5172	0.7113	.4937

(*Indicates a p value of .05 or less.)

Community Journalism at Work:

Newspapers Putting More Emphasis on Importance of Local News

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◆ The first author is a Ph. D. candidate in mass communications and a graduate lecturer of journalism at Penn State. The second author is a graduate student of media studies and a graduate lecturer of journalism at Penn State.

ABSTRACT

In a content analysis of daily newspapers with circulations under 50,000, described as "community newspapers," the authors found that, over the past 30 years, newspapers have increasingly devoted larger percentages of their front pages to the presentation of local news. The larger of these community newspapers appear more devoted to local news coverage, possibly as a result of having more resources available for such coverage than their smaller counterparts.

"Local, local, local" seem to be the code words for content recently at newspapers in the United States, with some of the best known and most respected newspapers in the nation making concerted efforts to "connect" with their readers by providing increased information about their communities in their news, features and sports sections (Rosen, 1993; Charity, 1996; Kaniss, 1991). Yet this practice is often considered a long-standing, standard procedure at smaller "community newspapers," or those published in rural and suburban markets, as well as in some urban neighborhoods, which rely on local news for their market niche (Lauterer, 1995). Some research indicates that the public relies more on newspapers for its local news than other media, further making the case for newspapers to put an emphasis on local coverage (Stempel, 1991).

Though this idea seems to have re-emerged only in recent years among larger newspapers, some in academe contend that this emphasis has a long-standing history among smaller newspapers, especially at weeklies and dailies with circulations of 50,000 and under, which are often called "community newspapers" (ASNE, 1993). Academic discussion on the concept of community journalism stretches back at least 35 years, when then-University of North Carolina professor Ken Byerly published an instructional text on the subject, stating that the key to practicing community journalism is, above all, to cover local news (Byerly, 1961). Since then, some scholars have drawn distinctions between these so-called "small newspapers" and urban newspapers with circulations well above 50,000, not just in matters of circulation size and newsroom budgets, but also in the procedures used to gather, present and evaluate their efforts (Lauterer, 1995; McCleneghan, 1995; Olien, Donohue and Tichenor, 1984; Sheppard, 1996; Stein, 1998). Aside from a few issue-specific studies published over the years (and several studies conducted in the 1980s by a group of University of Minnesota scholars, including Phillip J. Tichenor, Clarise N. Olien, and George A. Donohue) there does not appear to be very much quantitative research which focuses on, specifically, community newspapers. This may be a disservice to both the newspaper industry and to scholars, as the vast majority of newspapers in this country fall within this category: approximately 85 percent of the daily newspapers in the United States have circulations below 50,000, and 69 percent have circulations of 25,000 or less (Anderson, 1997).

Of the research that has been conducted on this topic, some scholars have used circulation size as a variable which may correlate with news coverage. One study found that smaller newspapers tend to devote a larger percentage of their space to news copy than medium-sized and large papers (Lacy & Bernstein, 1988). Also, some researchers have found that even subjectively "bad" reporting of local issues, by poorly-trained or lazy editorial staffs, is still considered very important in communities, especially in light of the continued impact of television news competition on newspaper readership (Emig, 1995; Kaniss, 1991; Olien, et al., 1984; Stempel, 1991).

This study attempts to discern whether there are measurable correlations between circulation size and a newspaper's commitment to local news and sports coverage among

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community newspapers. It also looks for any changes, over time, in the amount of local news and local sports that these newspapers have put on their section fronts, in an attempt to gauge the importance placed on local information over other news and sports reports.

To that end, a content analysis was done on a random sample of newspapers in Pennsylvania, and the data were processed quantitatively using these research questions:

This study attempts to discern whether there are measurable correlations between circulation size and a newspaper's commitment to local news and sports coverage

- **RQ1:** For Pennsylvania daily newspapers under 50,000 in circulation, controlling for circulation size using three categorical subdivisions, what is the relationship between the passage of time and the amount of local news appearing on the front page?
- **RQ2:** For Pennsylvania daily newspapers under 50,000 in circulation, controlling for time, what is the relationship between circulation size and the amount of local news appearing on the front page?
- **RQ3:** For Pennsylvania daily newspapers under 50,000 in circulation, controlling for circulation size using three categorical subdivisions, what is the relationship between the passage of time and the placement of local stories in lead positions on the front page?
- **RQ4:** For Pennsylvania daily newspapers under 50,000 in circulation, controlling for time, what is the relationship between circulation size and the placement of local stories in lead positions on the front page?

The same four questions also were asked with regard to local sports coverage on the front page of sports sections, using the same independent variables but replacing "local news" data with "local sports" data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the published research specifically focusing on community journalism seems to be based on anecdotal evidence and the field experiences of journalists-turned-scholars. These arguments seem sound and appear to be embraced by an increasing number of newspapers (Morton, 1990), but the majority seems to be qualitative in nature. Since the early 1990s, for example, considerable research and outreach efforts by John Neibergall and others at the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at Kansas State University have promoted, among other goals, the development and publication of more academic studies in this distinct field (Oukrop, 1995), though, again, these studies seem to be mostly qualitative studies.

Though there are some studies which compare the content of small newspapers with that of larger papers, there is little to be found in the way of published quantitative research to support claims about community journalism aside from the work of Tichenor, Olien and Donohue, which points to significant differences between larger, urban newspapers and smaller newspapers in rural or suburban communities. But, again, there appear to be only a few studies which focus specifically on community journalism, possibly as a result of the little attention the concept has received over the years.

For purposes of this kind of research, and in order to explicate the theory as a distinct concept, community journalism might be defined in terms of degrees of three elements: scope, content, and process (Reader, 1998). Scope refers to circulation size, as well as the geographic coverage areas of newspapers (Sheppard, 1996). Content could be a measure of local versus non-local news in a newspaper's regular editions (Gibbs, 1995; Morton, 1990). Process, then, could be described as a newspaper's overall strategy in gathering and presenting news; this might not be evidenced so much by content, but rather by the level of concern and involvement a newspaper displays toward the community which it serves, either as a matter of regular practice (Lauterer, 1995; McCleneghan, 1995) or, in the case of public or civic journalism efforts, as specific projects aiming to foster more intimate relationships between newspapers and their communities (Charity, 1996; Winn, 1993; Giles, 1993; Rosen, 1993).

Of the three components, content and scope seem to lend themselves best to quantitative analysis, while process might be best studied through qualitative means. Thus, this analysis employs the two measurable variables of scope and content. Furthermore, the study confines its purview to daily newspapers with circulations under 50,000, a benchmark number set by the industry in categorizing community newspapers (ASNE, 1993).

METHODS

The sampling frame (N=216) was built from the total of 69 Pennsylvania daily newspapers listed in the 1997 Editor & Publisher International Year Book (Anderson, 1997), recognized as one of the industry's most comprehensive catalogs of American daily newspapers. Those newspapers with circulations of more than 50,000, totaling nine, were excluded from the frame, as they are not considered community newspapers (although their devotion to local news may be significant). A random sample was drawn from the remaining 60 newspapers which had published continuously since 1965.

Pennsylvania was chosen for matters of convenience — a comprehensive selection of small daily newspapers from around the United States was not readily available to the authors. However, an argument could be made that Pennsylvania's diverse demographics would not make its newspapers any more or less extraordinary than the newspapers of other states. Thus these findings, to at least some

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degree, might be replicated by analyzing samples from other states or the nation as a whole.

The starting date of 1965 was chosen because of Byerly's teachings in the 1960s, which apparently were the first to recognize "community journalism" as a distinct concept (though no assumptions were made as to the extent of this single scholar's impact on the industry — it was simply the earliest reference to the concept that could be found). That starting point also coincides with the rise of local television news coverage, which may have increased the competitive need for newspapers to increase local news (Bliss, 1991; Kaniss, 1991).

SAMPLING

The sample was stratified to include two newspapers from each of three circulation categories: 10,000 and under; 10,001 to 25,000; and 25,001 to 50,000. These categories mirror circulation categories used by Editor & Publisher to differentiate newspaper size for purposes of comparison and awards competitions (Anderson, 1997); however, the 10,000 and under grouping used in the study is actually a combination of Editor & Publisher's two smallest circulation categories for daily newspapers.

The newspapers to be analyzed were selected through random assignment.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Circulation figures served as the independent variable in two of the four research questions — those measuring local content against newspaper size and the nature of lead stories against newspaper size.

For the other two research questions — those measuring local content against the three described eras and the nature of lead stories over those eras — it was necessary to operationalize time as a measurable, independent variable.

Using the constructed-week method of sampling determined to be highly effective in previous content analyses (Riffe, 1993), two representative weeks (Monday through Saturday) were randomly built for each of three time periods: 1965 to 1974, 1975 to 1984, and 1985 to 1996. Sundays were excluded from the constructed weeks since few dailies published Sunday editions over the entire period, and several do not publish on Sundays to this day.

Two weeks were constructed, through random assignment of weekdays and years, for each of the three time periods, or "eras." The use of this data as both ordinal (era) and interval (year) values allowed for a variety of statistical tests. A total of 216 editions were coded for in this study: six editions each of the six selected newspapers for each of the six constructed weeks.

DEPENDENT MEASURES

The dependent variables were the percentages of local items on news and sports fronts and whether the lead stories in each section were local or non-local.

Because newspapers typically reserve their front pages for the stories considered most important by their editors and staff, the regular placement of local stories on front pages was used as a measure of newspapers' commitment to local news, as was the use of local sports items on the fronts of sports sections. Thus, content analysis was restricted to the front pages of the papers ("news fronts") and the front pages of the sports sections ("sports fronts"). The total number of news items ("stories"), and the number of those items which included local content, were counted from both pages of each edition. A total of 2,122 news stories and 2,103 sports stories were thus coded.

PROCEDURE

With few exceptions, the coders counted all headline-and-text combinations as stories, regardless of the size of each item — the reasoning being that even a brief on a front page might be considered more important by editors than an entire story on an inside page. The exception were teasers, or references to more complete stories within. Wire stories were immediately dismissed as non-local, even if the topic had a local angle. Staff-written stories, or items with no byline information, were read to determine if they were local or not, using criteria outlined in the code book — in general, items that would be of only local interest were considered as "local". Often, coders would have to read only the headline and/or story lead before being able to make that determination; in the cases where, for example, a newspaper's sportswriters wrote columns about issues of national or regional appeal, with no mention of local issues, the items were counted as non-local.

To identify the lead story on each page, coders generally chose the story in the top right-hand corner of the page or the one stripped across the top of the newshole; when placement was not an adequate measure, headline size was also considered.

The coders were reasonably assured of agreement, as a pre-test showed intercoder reliability to be 100 percent for most variables and no less than 80 percent for any one variable. The code book was further refined after the pre-test.

Proceeding in this manner, a total of 216 newspaper editions were analyzed to provide the following dependent variables: **percentage of local news stories** (calculated for each news front as the number of local stories divided by total stories, and treated as a ratio measure); **percentage of local sports stories** (calculated for each sports front as the number of local stories divided by total stories, also considered a ratio measure); **lead news story** (either local or non-local for each edition, a nominal value); and **lead sports story** (either local or non-local for each edition, also coded as a nominal value).

Once the data was collected, it was analyzed through a variety of univariate and bivariate tests using the JMP statistical analysis software program. Bivariate analyses mostly included one-sample ANOVA and Chi-Square contingency table analyses, with some statistical regressions used to support the time correlations.

RESULTS

The newspapers carried an average of 9.8 stories per news front and 9.7 stories per sports front over all three time periods, with the actual number of items per page decreasing steadily over time — a reflection of the newspaper industry's trend toward less cluttered pages (Harrower, 1995). The average number of local stories on the news front was 3.0, while the average number of local stories on the sports front was 4.2. When a percentage of local coverage was calculated for each edition, the mean for local news was 36.5 percent, while the mean for local sports was 42.6 percent. With regard to the designation of the lead story on both news and sports fronts, 57 of 216 lead news stories were local and 91 of 216 lead sports stories were local.

Using this data, bivariate analysis showed a significant positive relationship between local news content and the passage of time, with the amount of local news on front news pages increasing over all three time periods. This is shown by a one-way ANOVA test with F(2,213)=4.31, p<.05, and a post-hoc test that pinpoints the difference between eras 1 and 3 (**FIGURE 1**). Because there was no significant difference between data for the first and second eras, as well as for the second and third eras, a regression analysis was also performed, substituting the years of publication as continuous independent variables, further substantiating the findings, with F(1,214)=12.41, p<.05 (**FIGURE 2**).

Furthermore, a significant relationship was found by analyzing the percentage of local news by circulation size, F(2,213)=51.76, p<.05, (**FIGURE 3**)with those newspapers in the high end of the sample (those in the 25,001 to 50,000 circulation range) putting more local news on their front pages over the three eras than those in smaller categories.

The number of times the newspapers used local stories as lead stories also increased over time, with 6 of 72 stories in the first era being local, 18 of 72 in the second era and 33 of 72 in the third (**FIGURE 4, next page**).

The analysis of lead news stories, as a function of circulation category, yielded nondirectional relationships.

The effects of time and scope on sports sections were also measured using the same formulae and the same independent variables as for news, but the findings proved statistically insignificant even after several degrees of power analysis. However, the raw data itself is interesting to compare with raw data from the tests for news fronts: as stated above, the percentage of local sports for the entire sample was 42.6 percent, compared to the local news figure of 36.5 percent. Additionally, the sports fronts carried more local lead stories than the news fronts: 42.1 percent of the sports fronts had local lead stories, compared to the 26.3 percent of news fronts which had local leads. These findings are discussed further in the next section.

FIG. 1

Local News by Era

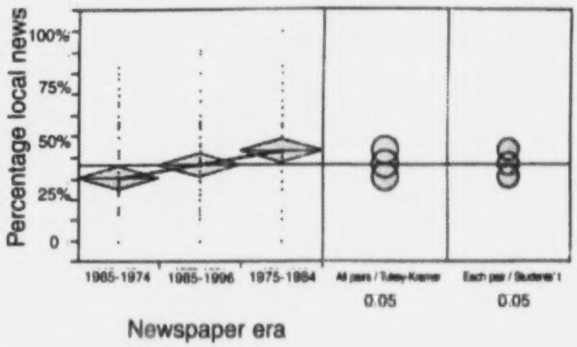


FIG. 2

Lead News Story by Year

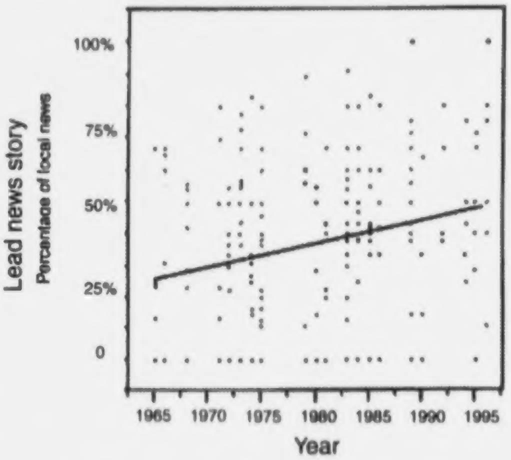
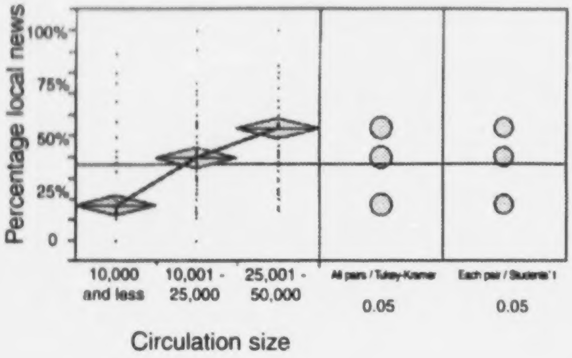


FIG. 3

Local News by Circulation Size



DISCUSSION

Newspapers with circulations under 50,000 — newspapers identified as community newspapers — appear to have steadily increased their emphasis on local news coverage over the past three decades, particularly when it comes to front-page presentations. This growing emphasis is important to note in the newspaper industry as it continues to adapt to competitive pressures from other media, particularly television and radio, and emerging media such as online communications. This change may be of particular importance to community newspapers as they try to compete with larger, urban or regional newspapers which have more resources to devote to staff coverage.

This study doesn't measure the reasons why community newspapers have made this change, but we feel it provides a strong argument that the industry is living up to its claims that it recognizes the importance of providing its readers with local content, and also recognizes the importance of providing that content in greater, or at least more prominent, degrees. If local news is the principal product of community journalism, then it seems evident that these newspapers are surely embracing their roles as community

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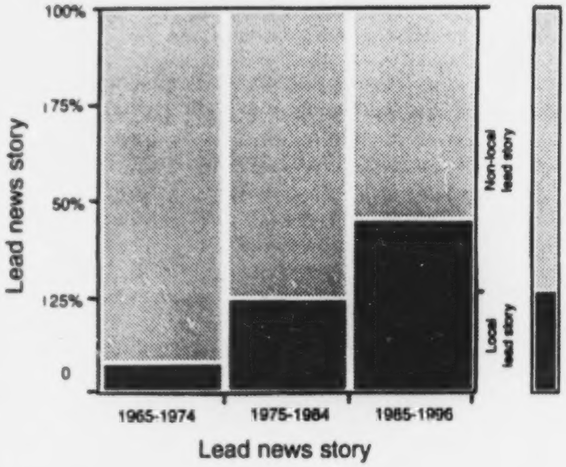
newspapers.

FIG. 4

Lead News Story by Era



These findings also provide some evidence that community journalism is not a relatively new phenomenon, as some in the civic/public journalism camp may argue — on the contrary, the idea of "connecting" newspapers with their readers through extensive local coverage has a pattern that can be charted as increasing in popularity among newspapers over at least 30 years. Perhaps it is this increase in local news emphasis which has prompted more contemporary scholars to investigate the potential value of community journalism, either through efforts to "reconnect" with communities through civic journalism projects, or, in the case of scholars at the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media and individual researchers at other colleges, by studying the ethical, procedural and managerial issues which are distinct to community newspapers.

This study also raises some questions in regard to the resources newspapers devote to local news coverage and presentation. Among papers with circulations under 50,000, the larger papers seem to be filling their front news pages with higher percentages of local stories than smaller papers. This finding is counterintuitive to the original hypotheses of the authors, whose personal experiences in community journalism led them to suspect that the smallest papers would be more intimately involved with their communities and thus show the greatest commitment to putting local news on their front pages. However, it could be that the larger community newspapers simply have more staff and resources available to devote to local coverage (Lacy & Bernstein, 1988), lessening their reliance on wire services to fill out their pages. It will be interesting to watch this in the coming years, especially in light of a recent study that suggests economic pressures are forcing papers under 25,000 to place more emphasis on profit, and less emphasis on content, while larger, more financially stable newspapers are trying to improve their news content (Demers' study, as cited in Stein, 1998).

So, even though small-town papers and small-town news sound like a logical match, it is evident that limitations on resources might actually place the smaller newspapers at a disadvantage when it comes to gathering and reporting front-page local news. Smaller newspapers, those under 25,000 circulation, should consider that local coverage could be essential to their survival in the increasingly competitive industry — one industry observer notes that many community newspapers that are poorly designed and/or include poor writing, but still manage to post circulation gains because, despite their shortcomings, "they are chock full of solid, bread-and-butter local news" (Authelet, 1991). By doing so, the newspapers may forge stronger ties, as expressed by one newspaper executive: "Newspapers that immerse themselves in the lives of their communities ... have the best prospects for success in the years ahead. And they have the best chance of drawing people in from the apathetic periphery to the vibrant center of community life. That will be good for the communities, and good for the newspapers" (Batten, 1990).

As for this study's assessment of local sports coverage, while the analysis did not yield significant statistical relationships between the variables, it is interesting to note that, for the entire 30-year period, sports fronts contained a higher percentage of local coverage than did the news fronts. This may be an indication that the priorities of sports departments at community newspapers have been fairly strong toward local coverage all along, though only additional research could support this hypothesis.

This study also poses some questions as to just what "local" means. The non-significant nature of the statistical findings in regard to sports coverage, for instance, may be attributed to the restrictive coding parameters which discounted staff coverage of national-level sporting events as non-local. Consider: Of the six newspapers selected, four were from markets located in close geographic proximity to sports teams of national interest. Since this study focused on news and sports that would be mostly of *only* local interest to readers of the respective newspapers, these "big-time" stories were not considered local by the coders, though those sports departments might certainly consider such coverage as local.

Considering these afterthoughts, less-restrictive coding for "local sports" may have been more appropriate for this study. Future studies may want to consider such stories as local, or create a third data set for this project design which recognizes staff-generated coverage of nationally recognized sporting events as local.

Overall, it is hoped that this study may help other scholars to recognize community journalism is not only a legitimate, but important, area of study. As far as research journals go, the concept of community journalism seems to have been largely overlooked in published quantitative research, even though the vast majority of newspapers in this country are considered community newspapers. Further encouragment comes from the fact that many larger, urban newspapers are beginning to recognize what smaller newspapers have, apparently, recognized long ago — that they need to put community journalism to work.

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Local Press Coverage of Environmental Conflict:

A Content Analysis of the Daily Review, 1985-1994

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LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE DAILY REVIEW, 1985-1994

Abstract

An examination of 600 items in the local press coverage of environmental conflict over a ten-year period showed that a community daily in a small, but heterogeneous system (1) did indeed favor government/industry sources rather than activists/citizens through all five stages of the conflict; (2) supported local industry in editorials and staff opinion columns in only two stages (*Mobilization* and *Confrontation*); and (3) legitimized local industry and marginalized its opponents through all five stages.

LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE DAILY REVIEW, 1985-1994

There is a rich tradition of research on the mass media and community conflict in small, homogenous and large, pluralistic communities, but far less attention has been given to environmental issues in "fragmented" communities.[1] In the rural south where such groupings are situated between small-homogenous and large-pluralistic metropolitan areas, the existence of such "fragmented" communities poses an important yet unanswered question about how news media function covering the conflict of protracted environmental struggles.

American environmentalism in the 1990s has been credited with precipitating "a collision with long-dominant political and economic values."[2] Whenever there are angry citizens in debate, whether it is about a nuclear power plant, an urban renewal project, or location of a chemical waste disposal site, it often becomes a question of whose ox is being gored.[3] In a community conflict case involving a meat packing plant, for example, residents with little to lose if the plant were to close were most supportive of efforts to stop that town's largest employer from dumping raw sewage into a river.[4]

Residents of small communities experiencing high unemployment tend to welcome new industry that promises to create hundreds of jobs and pour millions of dollars into the stagnant economy. When it involves hazardous waste, however, community reaction often divides residents into two groups: those who applaud the windfall of new employment opportunities and those who point ominously at the potential health and safety risks. The size and fabric of such a community, the level of local journalists' interest, and the parent company's attempts to mold public opinion also influence the development and outcome of such conflicts.[5]

By tracing the evolution of one "fragmented" community's experience over a 10-year period, it is possible to discern how coverage of an environmental dispute over a planned hazardous waste incinerator was framed in terms of the powers involved at different stages during the community conflict. By doing so, we attempt to assess how the local press framed the conflict and sought to influence the outcome of this potential health and environmental hazard.

Brief Background of the Controversy

Several stakeholders were identified in this study, but the primary conflict pitted Marine Shale Processors (MSP), the fourth largest employer of a south Louisiana Parish against environmental activists, including Greenpeace, who voiced angry opposition to this hazardous waste treatment plant. The following account reveals how the fear of carcinogens provoked citizen wrath and produced mediated expressions of opinion based on health and environmental regulations directed at the incinerator's firm.

Shortly after installing a nonhazardous oil field waste incinerator in 1985, MSP began accepting and burning hazardous materials in St. Mary Parish, Louisiana. Company officials explained that the toxic waste was to be recycled into nonhazardous materials and used as fill for roads and properties. News of the hazardous waste burning galvanized residents of east St. Mary Parish (Amelia, Morgan City, Berwick, and Patterson), and polarized those concerned with environmental and health safety against those supporting MSP's infusion of capital and jobs into an area suffering from a slowdown in the oil and gas industry.

Opponents claimed that MSP repeatedly violated federal environmental regulations, and was a sham recycler exempt from stringent hazardous waste incinerator laws. They argued that the company was responsible for a handful of childhood cancer cases.[6] Company officials and supporters countered with evidence that MSP was not a polluter, and that it used innovative technology to recycle hazardous waste into safe materials.

Government agencies appeared at first to be unable to reliably assess whether the company was in fact a hazardous recycler legitimately qualified to operate under less stringent rules, or whether it should be subject to stricter, and consequently more expensive environmental regulations. In 1995, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) denied the company's request for a permit to operate its industrial furnace.

Related Studies

Issues related to news coverage and community conflicts have intrigued researchers since Chicago sociologists first examined the press in urban settings at the turn of this century.[7] The literature has established that the news media occupy a subsystem within the total community system, affecting and being affected by other subsystems, including the business community. In both small, homogenous communities and larger, pluralistic ones, news stories generally reflect the viewpoints of power elites.[8] Likewise, residents in small-homogenous communities tend to support their local institutions, including media outlets, perceiving those local media to be fairer than the external media in the news coverage of community conflicts.[9]

Media reports help define a conflict and frame it for their activists. The media, through selection of sources and placement of their statements in stories, can legitimize one perspective while withholding legitimacy from another--in essence restricting the flow of information to the community--and thereby influencing the outcome of the conflict.[10]

A community's reaction to the location or expansion of a hazardous waste facility will largely affect the future of the plant and its relationship with the community. High levels of toxins may lead to lawsuits embroiling the industry and community in court battles for years, producing negative publicity, and dividing the community.[11] The industry, in turn, vies to restore its reputation by engaging support from media and civic leaders in a battle to win public opinion in the community where it operates.

The concept of community has been defined in various ways by social scientists, including communication researchers. Some, describe it "as a locality--people grouped by geographic location."[12] Others define it as, not just a geographic locale, but also the governmental structure encompassing social and political relationships.[13] Community is "a territorially organized system coextensive with a settlement pattern" that includes an effective, operating communication network, people sharing facilities and services in the settlement, and a psychological identification with a local symbol, the community name.[14]

In a study of 88 Minnesota editors' influence in community conflict, Olien, Donohue, and Tichenor[15] described a dichotomous structure, distinguishing between small communities with populations under 3,499 and large communities with 3,500 or more residents. They also measured community pluralism by summarizing the rank position based on five characteristics: municipal populations; number of businesses; number of voluntary groups; number of churches; and number of schools and educational centers.[16]

Researchers discovered that the degree to which a community is homogenous or pluralistic has a bearing on the likelihood that conflict will disrupt the community, the manner in which the local media cover the conflict, and the type of community relations programs an organization implements. Most organizations recognize the importance of maintaining an employable work force, customers, suppliers, and incentives to attract personnel, as well as constraining its activities if citizens become angered by them.[17]

Communities today find themselves with decidedly less ability to control outside entities who thread themselves with financial incentives into a community's social fabric, whether welcome or not. Plans to enter a community create the potential for conflict as some citizens embrace increased economic opportunities, while others resist the sudden shift of power, and influence.[18]

Local economics influence local news coverage, particularly stories of controversial issues such as the environment.[19] A local newspaper's profits depend upon advertising revenue and readership, therefore, the larger the community's population and the healthier the local economy, the greater the potential revenue of the local newspaper.[20] Smaller circulation newspapers like *The Daily Review,* of Morgan City, Louisiana, appear more vulnerable to economic pressure than larger ones which have a broader base of economic support. The type of system or structure in which the media operate affects the size of the local newspaper and its coverage. In many cases, the media content is determined partly by those who finance it: publishers, advertisers, and business elites.[21]

There is even evidence of publishers assuming an active role in directing newsroom activity on issues that conceivably might affect the newspaper's revenue, particularly dailies and weeklies with a circulation of under 15,000.[22] Bowers attributed intrusive publisher activity at smaller newspapers to the publisher's familiarity with the community and staff, and to the newspaper's smaller and less stable economic base.

Conflict generally can be described as a struggle over scarce resources, and the size of a community affects conflicts in terms of frequency and intensity. Conflict will occur with greater frequency in larger communities, but conflict arising in smaller communities will be more intense.[23] Media in larger communities are more likely to provide coverage of community conflicts than media in smaller communities, which often see their role as that of a community booster, maintaining the status quo and avoiding coverage viewed as adverse to the civic peace of the area served.

Purpose of this Study

Building on earlier research of news coverage of controversial issues, this research analyzes an environmental controversy over a 10-year time span. It identifies stages of this conflict in order to determine whether the local press used government and industry sources more often than activists in stories; supported local industry in its editorials and staff opinion columns; and legitimized local industry and business elites through the use of positive framing of news items.

By analyzing a small, privately-owned daily, this study gives an added dimension to prior research on newsmaking. Soloski[24] noted that most studies of the newsmaking process have focused on major metropolitan dailies dissimilar demographically to small daily newspapers. The median circulation for all U.S. dailies is under 25,000. The newspaper examined in this study, *The Daily Review* of Morgan City, Louisiana, is privately owned, has a circulation of 6,000, and is the only daily published in the "fragmented" community area.

The study also expands the model used in a Minnesota study, with communities varying in size from under 2,000 to 100,000 residents. That is the range applied to "fragmented" communities --those that are small, heterogeneous and served by daily newspapers as opposed to weeklies--outside the Minnesota area.

Research Questions

The entry of the news media into a community problem may determine how an issue develops into a conflict, or if a conflict emerges at all. The literature suggests that a newspaper's entry into a community controversy has a decided impact on the outcome. It can define the issues, legitimize the arguments and parties involved, and reinforce the positions taken by the community's business and civic leaders or the opposing activist groups. Will the anticipated behavioral patterns of the press, in "fragmented" communities--small, heterogeneous communities--served by daily newspapers, be as predictive as those found in large, heterogeneous and small, homogenous communities?

Prior research indicates that the media rely heavily upon government and industry as sources both in routine and crisis reporting. Whether or not an issue or group is accepted as legitimate and reasonable based upon community norms is viewed as a factor of its portrayal in the local media. Research suggests media outlets tend to reinforce the position of the community's upper echelon--business, industry, community leaders--and rely heavily upon well-established organizations as sources of information. By doing so, the media give salience to one side of an issue while denying opposing viewpoints equal importance.

This study is thus guided by three basic questions:

(1) Did the local press use government and industry sources more often than other sources, including activists through stages in the conflict?

(2) Did the local press support local industry through its editorials and staff opinion columns in all stages of the conflict?

(3) Did the local press legitimize local industry through the use of positive framing in news stories in all stages of the conflict?

Methods

The Data: The content universe for this study consists of a census[25] of all published items about MSP Inc. in *The Daily Review* of Morgan City between January 1985 and December 1994.

The data set covered a total of 602 cases consisting of 442 news items and 158 non-news items (two cases were not coded for this measure). Non-news items include advertisements, editorials, letters to the editor, and staff opinion columns.

All data were collected at the Morgan City Archives using microfilm machines and actual newspapers. Each edition was analyzed based on a pre-constructed, pre-printed coding scheme.[26] Overall inter-coder reliability[27] achieved 80 percent agreement for the key variables, and overall intra-coder reliability was 84 percent.

The Community: For the purposes of this study, East St. Mary Parish was considered as a single unit, a single "community," sharing both small and large community characteristics. The population of East St. Mary Parish, according to U.S. Census reports, was 30,462, which fits neither the defined population of a small, rural community nor an urban area. It has been defined as "fragmented" by communication scholars based on elements of diversity and population dispersion.

In their research, Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor[28] observed that as a community's population increases, so does its diversity. Is it conceivable to assume that a decrease in population can result in a decrease in pluralism? The population of East St. Mary Parish fell by more than 4,000 between 1980 and 1990, however, there was an influx of workers from across the nation in these years when the oil industry expanded, which added to the community's ethnic, religious, and social traditions. East St. Mary Parish is thus a "fragmented" community,[29] one which is small in size (population) but has a heterogeneous population and social system.

Conflict Stages: The present study identified the five conflict stages over the 10-year period of investigation--*Initiation, Mobilization, Bureaucratic, Confrontation*, and *Trial*-- prior studies have concluded are common to most conflicts.[30] The *Initiation* stage is conceptually defined as the beginning of a community controversy, when sides of an issue are formed and the conflict is first defined. The *Mobilization* stage occurs when a visible number of residents begin to organize in opposition to an issue or controversy. A conflict moves into the *Bureaucratic* stage when much of the debate occurs in government proceedings and public hearings. The

Confrontation stage occurs when the involved parties resort to confrontation, either face-to-face such as protests, or through lawsuits. Finally, the *Trial* stage occurs when the controversy moves into the courts for resolution.

Dependent Measures: Dependent measures include: (1) news story sources; (2) number of pro-MSP versus anti-MSP/neutral editorials and opinion columns; and (3) positive framing of MSP versus activists defined by position in story, sources, and slant.

For measuring the sources (appearing in the subset of news stories only), a maximum of eight sources were recorded for each category per story (range 0-8). "Government sources" referred to the local, state and federal government officials as well as judges. "MSP sources" meant anyone, excluding industry scientists, speaking on behalf of, or as representative of, the company. "Activists" referred to anyone speaking on behalf of, or as a representative of, any organized, official activist, advocacy, or protest groups. This could include members of or representatives of South Louisianians Against Pollution (SLAP) and the Atchafalaya Delta Society (ADS), both based in Morgan City, the Hazardous Waste Treatment Council (HWTC) based in Washington, D.C., Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste (CCHW) in Arlington, Virginia, the international Greenpeace group, and the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN). "Residents" referred to those from the St. Mary Parish area speaking either for or against MSP. "Scientists" referred to anyone employed by or speaking voluntarily on behalf of the industry, government, and activist groups.

Editorials and opinion columns were coded using binary discretion, either 1 or 0. If the story appeared to endorse MSP's position, it was coded as 1 (pro-MSP), otherwise it was coded as 0 (anti-MSP or neutral). Only activists and MSP sources are included in the framing analysis because they represent polar opposites in the conflict: industry and the jobs created versus health and environmental safety factors.

Framing scores were created by summing five measures: MSP and activists' positions in story, MSP and activist use as sources, and slant. MSP and activists were scored on where they appeared in each story. If MSP or activists were mentioned throughout the story, they were assigned a 3; first half of the story only, a 2; second half only, 1; and no mention, zero. Pro-MSP items were scored as 1 point; anti-MSP/neutral items as 0. Source totals for each group were added with slant (pro-MSP is rated 1; anti-MSP or neutral rates 0) and position score. The higher the total framing score, the more positively that group was framed by the press.

Findings

Data Characteristics: Table 1 shows the separate, but overlapping phases of the conflict development in this environmental problem. All items published in 1985 and 1986 appeared in the *Initiation* stage. Items published in 1987 overlap the Initiation stage and enter into the *Mobilization* stage, since that marks the point when citizens began mobilizing against MSP, motivated by the company's offer to accept the infamous New York garbage barge.[31] *The Mobilization* stage proceeded into 1988, then emerged as the *Bureaucratic* stage, which progressed through 1989 and into 1990. In 1990, the conflict evolved into a *Confrontation* stage, which gained momentum through 1991 and into 1992. The Trial stage appeared in 1992 and slowly migrated through to the end of 1994, when the study concluded.

Table 1 shows how the coverage of the MSP conflict began slowly in 1985 and 1986 with fewer than 30 items published per year. It peaked in 1988 when 21.6 percent of the published items appeared, and then dropped to 17.8 percent in 1989. Citizens began mobilizing against MSP in the Fall of 1987, but then a suspected link with childhood cancer surfaced in 1988, which contributed to the increased coverage. Coverage again peaked in 1994 when 11.8 percent of the items were published, largely covering the trial of a lawsuit between the EPA and MSP over the legitimacy of the company as a hazardous waste recycler.

TABLE 1

Percent Distribution of Printed Items by Conflict Stage, 1985-1994

Conflict Stages Year	INIT	MOB	BUR	CONF	TRIAL	Total
1985	44.6					4.8
1986	38.5					4.2
1987	16.9	67.9				11.3
1988		32.1	40.4			21.6
1989			42.0			17.8
1990			16.0	11.3		8.5
1991			1.6	73.0		11.5
1992				15.7	23.0	6.5
1993					11.9	2.2
1994					65.1	11.8
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	65	84	255	89	109	602

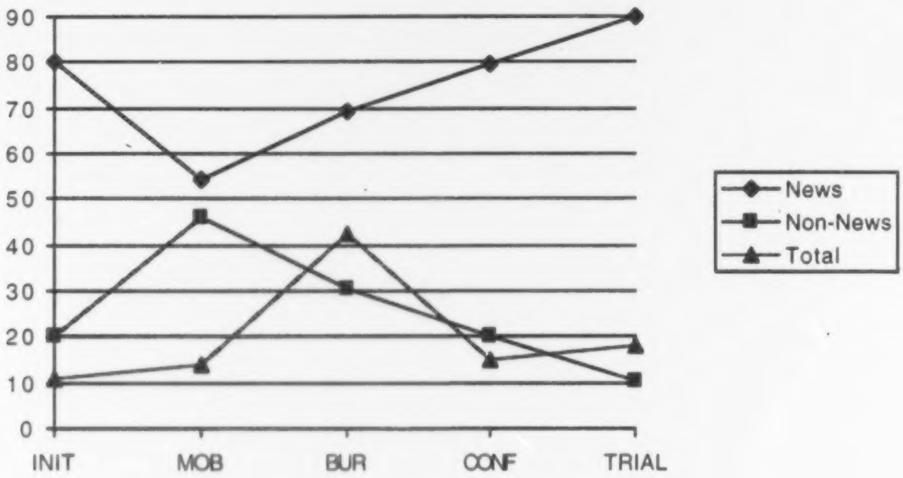
Note: N=602, the total number of all printed items analyzed. INIT=Initiation Stage; MOB=Mobilization Stage; BUR=Bureaucratic Stage; CONF=Confrontation Stage; TRIAL=Trial Stage.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of news items and non-news items over the five conflict stages. In the *Initiation* phase, 80 percent of the 65 published pieces were news, and 20 percent non-news. The difference between the number of news versus non-news items was the least during the *Mobilization* stage, when news comprised 54.2 percent of the 84 items published, and non-news comprised 45.8 percent. The *Bureaucratic* stage garnered the largest number of items (n=255) with 69.3 percent news vs. 30.7 percent non-news. The proportion of news coverage increased in the *Conflict* stage, when 79.8 percent of the 89 items was news versus 20.2 percent non-news. The largest spread between news and non-news items, however, occurred in the *Trial* stage, when 89.9 percent of the 109 items was coded as news and only 10.1 percent non-news.

The relationship between news/non-news and conflict stages was statistically significant (*x2*=36.5, *df*=4, *p*<.001) indicating not only the correct delineation of news stages but a correspondence in terms of reporting and commentary.

FIGURE 1

Percentage of News vs. Non-News Items by Conflict Stage



Note: N=602, the total number of all printed items analyzed. INIT=Initiation Stage; MOB=Mobilization Stage; BUR=Bureaucratic Stage; CONF=Confrontation Stage; TRIAL=Trial Stage. News items are written in article format that may (not always) include a byline. Non-News items include editorials, staff-written opinion page columns, letters to the editor, and advertisements.

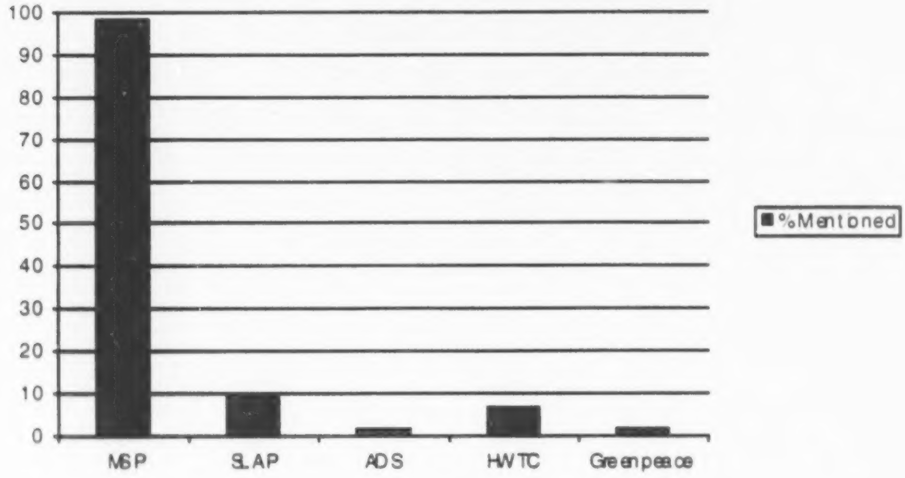
When controlled by slant, 67.7 percent (or 406) of the 600 valid cases were judged as anti-MSP or neutral, and 32.3 percent (or 194) were found to favor MSP. Of 442 news items, 78.7 percent (or 348) were judged as anti-MSP or neutral, 21.3 percent (or 94) as pro-MSP.

Figure 2 shows the marked contrast between coverage of MSP versus coverage of four activist groups involved in this debate. MSP was mentioned in 98.6 percent of 438 news items, while activist groups were mentioned in 19.8 percent, with South Louisianians Against Pollution

(SLAP) in 10.1 percent, Hazardous Waste Treatment Council (HWTC) in 6.9 percent, and Atchafalaya Delta Society (ADS) and Greenpeace in 1.4 percent each.

FIGURE 2

MSP vs. Activist Groups Mentioned in News Items, 1985-1994



Note: N=438, the number of news items excluding 4 cases with missing information. MSP=Marine Shale Processors Inc.; SLAP=South Louisianians Against Pollution; ADS=Achafalaya Delta Society; HWTC=Hazardous Waste Treatment Council; Greenpeace=International Greenpeace group.

Of 600 valid cases, 8.2 percent (or 49 items) were editorials and staff opinion columns. The largest coverage appeared in the *Initiation* stage of the conflict, accounting for 16.9 percent of the 65 published items. The smallest percentage was published in the Trial stage, 4.6 percent. It appears that as the conflict progressed through the five stages, the local press published fewer staff editorials and opinion columns about the topic.

News Sources and Conflict Stages: The first research question asked whether the local press cited government and industry sources more often than other sources, including activists, through all stages in this community conflict. The data answered in the affirmative and revealed marked differences across the five sources. Overall mean scores showed that government sources, including local, state, and federal elected officials, employees, and judges, were cited an average of 2.1 times per story, and MSP sources, 1.4 times per story (N=442). Mean scores for the remaining sources were noticeably lower: residents, .3; activists, .2; and scientists, .2.

Government sources were cited more often than any other sources for each conflict stage, except the *Confrontation* stage, when mean scores for MSP (1.7) and government sources (1.6) showed no statistically significant difference. The largest gap between MSP and government sources was in the *Initiation* stage (government, 2.7 and MSP, .94). Local and state government agencies were highly involved in this stage of the conflict, which included debates over which state agency had jurisdiction over MSP and whether the federal EPA should oversee the company. Local government, especially the St. Mary Parish Council and Councilman R. C. "Bob" McHugh were highly involved in the *Initiation* stage.

Mean scores showed that organized activists were not involved in the *Initiation* stage of the conflict, although residents were. Individual citizens raised objections to MSP in the *Initiation* stage, but did not organize until the *Mobilization* stage. Some of the sources cited as residents in the *Initiation* stage became Activist sources in the *Mobilization* stage and thereafter.

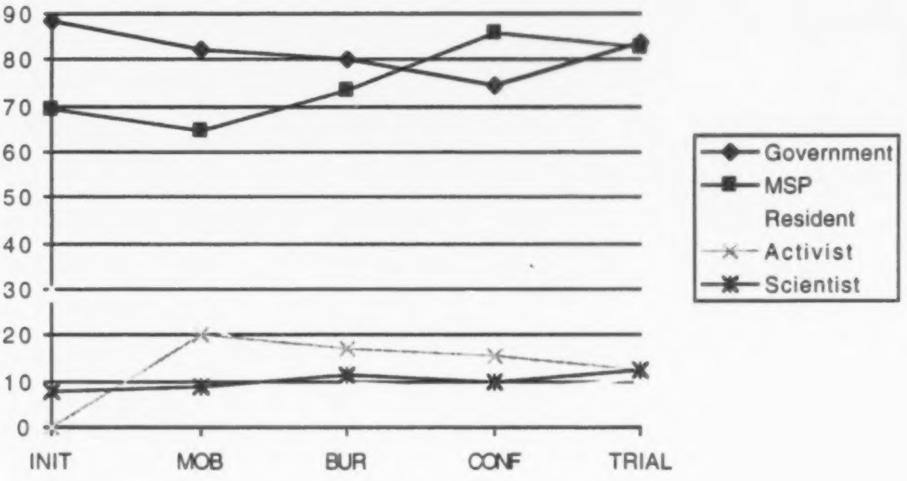
Overall, government sources were cited at least once in the majority of news items (81.2 percent of 442 news stories), MSP sources were cited in 76 percent, activists in 14 percent, residents in 13.1 percent, and scientists in 10.6 percent. Government sources were the most-often quoted individuals in the Initiation stage, with 88.5 percent of news stories citing at least one government representative, compared with 69.2 percent referring to MSP representatives, 28.8 percent citing residents, 7.7 percent scientists, with no activists sourced in the reports.

Figure 3 shows that government sources were most often cited in all but one conflict stage. During the *Confrontation* stage, 86 percent of the stories had at least one MSP source, compared with 74.6 percent with at least one government source. This may be explained to the sequence of events, since MSP was involved in confrontations and lawsuits filed by individuals--issues that did not directly involve government agents--and thus it was cited more often during this stage.

In the *Mobilization* stage, government sources again were most quoted, with 82.2 percent of the stories citing at least one government source. MSP sources were cited in 64.4 percent of the *Mobilization* stage stories, followed by residents, 22.2 percent; activists, 20 percent; and scientists, 8.8 percent. Activists were cited in a larger percentage of stories in the *Mobilization* stage than in any of the other four conflict stages. Conversely, MSP sources in the *Mobilization* stage were cited in a smaller percentage of stories than in any of the other four stages.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of Source Citations in News Stories by Conflict Stage



Note: N=442, the total number of all news items identified and analyzed. INIT=Initiation Stage; MOB=Mobilization Stage; BUR=Bureaucratic Stage; CONF=Confrontation Stage; TRIAL=Trial Stage.

Government and MSP sources were most cited in the *Bureaucratic* stage, with 80.1 percent of stories having at least one government source, and 73.3 percent referring to at least one MSP source (n=176). Activists were found in 17 percent of the *Bureaucratic* stories, scientists in 11.4 percent, and residents in 9.7 percent.

MSP spokespersons were used more than any other sources in the *Confrontation* stage, with 86 percent of the stories (n=71) citing at least one company source. Government officials followed, with 74.6 percent of the stories citing at least one. Activists were counted in 15.5 percent of the stories, scientists in 9.8 percent, and residents in 8.5 percent. Residents in the *Confrontation* stage occupied a smaller percentage of stories than in any of the other four stages. It should be noted that the confrontations were largely between MSP and organized opposition such as Greenpeace, or between MSP and residents involved in lawsuits, in which case court documents were usually cited instead of the individuals.

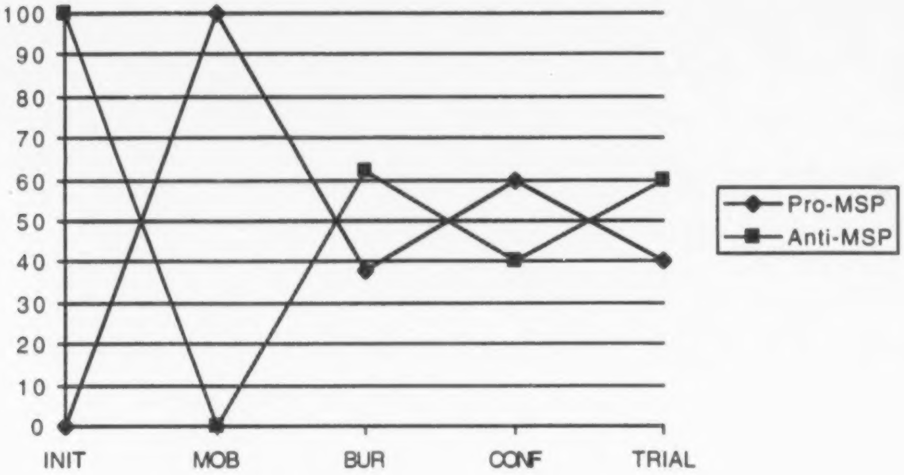
During the *Trial* stage, government and company sources were cited about equally: government sources in 83.6 percent of the stories, and MSP in 82.7 percent. Activists and scientists were cited equally, in 12.2 percent of the stories, with varying interpretations. Except for the *Initiation* stage before they organized, activists appeared in the smallest percentage of stories during the *Trial* stage. Conversely, scientists were cited in a larger percentage of stories during this stage than earlier or latter ones. Residents were cited in 10.2 percent of the stories during the *Trial* stage.

Government and MSP source means differed significantly for the *Initiation* and *Confrontation* stages, while resident sources differed for the *Initiation* and *Trial* stages. Findings suggest that government and MSP sources were cited significantly more often throughout the conflict than any other sources. Mean scores for the five source categories were not equal across the five conflict stages. Three source categories were significant at $p<.05$: government, ($F=3.2$, $df(4, 437)$, $p=.01$); MSP, ($F=4.1$, $df(4, 437)$, $p=.003$); and residents, ($F=2.8$, $df(4, 437)$, $p=.03$).

Editorial Endorsement and Conflict Stages: The second research question dealt with whether the local press supported local industry through its editorials and staff opinion columns in various stages of the conflict. Figure 4 depicts the finding that the local newspaper editorialized in support of local industry during two conflict stages--*Mobilization* and *Confrontation*--but not during the other three stages of the conflict.

FIGURE 4

Percentage of Editorial Supports by Conflict Stage



Note: Based on N=49, the total number of editorials and opinion items identified and analyzed in this study. INIT=Initiation Stage; MOB=Mobilization Stage; BUR=Bureaucratic Stage; CONF=Confrontation Stage; TRIAL=Trial Stage.

Overall, the division between pro-MSP versus anti/neutral stances was approximately 41 to 59 percent, respectively. During the *Mobilization* stage, however, all of the editorial items (n=7) were slanted in favor of MSP. In the *Confrontation* stage, 60 percent of the editorials favored MSP, while 40 percent were either anti-MSP or neutral (n=5). This finding suggests that, during the two most confrontational stages of the conflict--when citizens began mobilizing against MSP and when confrontations occurred between activists and MSP--the local newspaper's editorials and staff opinion columns appeared to support MSP's position in the community conflict.

One of the first staff opinion columns appearing in the *Initiation* stage predicted that "the battle will be a heated one and the parish is facing some powerful opposition" in MSP.[32] An editorial published late in the Initiation stage discussed community reaction to a fire at the company and encouraged it to be "a good corporate citizen."[33]

A few months later the conflict had moved into the Mobilization stage, after citizens organized following the floating garbage barge and child cancer stories. A staff opinion column in November 1987 urged authorities to consider air pollution in general before considering MSP as a possible cause for childhood cancer.[34] By 1989, as the conflict moved into the Bureaucratic stage, a staff opinion column titled "Kettle Calling the Pot Black?" blasted the Hazardous Waste Treatment Council--reportedly a conglomerate of waste incinerators--for "crowing about the latest regulatory misfortunes" of MSP.[35]

Framing, Legitimization and Conflict Stages: Data in Table 2 showed in all stages of the conflict, the local press legitimized local industry and marginalized opponents through the use of positive framing in its reporting. The cell means for MSP framing are markedly higher than that of activists for all five conflict stages. Means for the MSP framing scores across the five conflict stages were large, 4.5 (*sd*=1.3), compared with the activist framing, 1.5 (*sd*=.8), suggesting that the local newspaper consistently favored MSP in its coverage.

TABLE 2

Framing Scores for MSP vs. Activist Sources by Conflict Stage

	Conflict Stages					
Sources	**INIT**	**MOB**	**BUR**	**CONF**	**Trial**	**Total**
MSP	4.1	4.7	4.4	5.0	4.6	4.5
	(1.0)	(1.9)	(1.4)	(1.1)	(.9)	(1.3)
Activists	.4	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5
	(.2)	(1.0)	(.9)	(1.0)	(.6)	(.8)
Total (in items)	52	46	176	71	97	442

Note: Framing scores are presented along with standard deviations in parentheses (N=442, the total number of news items identified and analyzed). INIT=Initiation Stage; MOB=Mobilization Stage; BUR=Bureaucratic Stage; CONF=Confrontation Stage; TRIAL=Trial Stage.

Summary and Discussion

The local press coverage of the community conflict covered five stages, including sources used, editorial coverage, and framing of the issues based on the content of all published items. From a analysis of 600 (442 news and 158 non-news) items, we may conclude that: (1) The local press did indeed favor government and industry sources by citing them more often than activists and community residents through all stages of the conflict; (2) The local press supported local industry in editorials and staff opinion columns through only two stages of the conflict; and (3) The local press did indeed legitimize local industry and not its opponents through positive framing throughout the conflict.

This study adds in a new context further support to the existing literature that public officials and industry spokespersons are the predominant sources relied upon by the news media.[36] Even during the two most controversial stages of the conflict--*Mobilization* and *Confrontation,* the local press cited industry spokespersons more often that activists. If the local industry and government are cited more often than activist opponents by the margins documented here, it is reasonable to conclude that the newspaper's readers are receiving a skewed view of the conflict. This finding is consistent with prior studies concluding that the local media tend to support the dominant position of business and civic leaders, thereby reinforcing the status quo.[37]

Second, the question of whether or not the local press, through editorials and staff opinion columns, would support local industry in all stages of a community conflict yielded interesting results. In only two stages of conflict, *Mobilization* and *Confrontation*, the local newspaper editorialized more heavily in favor of MSP than against it. Adding to the importance of this issue were allegations by some local activists that *The Daily Review* favored MSP, and claims by MSP that the newspaper was biased against them--allegations that led to an editorial pronouncing the newspaper's objectivity. Accusations, the editorial stated, will not "persuade us to prostitute the editorial columns of this newspaper for the sake of MSP or anti-MSP proponents at the expense of our readers."[38]

During the *Initiation* stage, *The Daily Review's* editorials and opinion columns were all anti-MSP or neutral. None supported the company's position. An example of the newspaper's early editorial position was published August 23, 1985: "We do not want a toxic waste dump here. We do not want increased cancer rates. Our economic situation is not yet that desperate."[39]

During this early stage, the dominant forces involved in the conflict included a single parish councilman and a handful of concerned citizens versus MSP and a handful of businessmen. During the *Mobilization* stage, when organized opposition emerged, the newspaper shifted its editorial stance in favor of the company. A June 19, 1987, editorial proclaimed, "There is no determination of any long-range effects of hazardous waste disposal activities, just as there are not determinants for long-range effects on computer terminal operators--another relatively new business--or for eating blackened redfish.[40]

The newspaper again supported MSP editorially during the Confrontation stage, when the company faced lawsuits and protests by the international environmental group Greenpeace, which drew extensive media coverage. By this stage, some local business organizations and officials began supporting MSP with resolutions, petitions to state government, and public statements. (The local Chamber of Commerce named MSP Business of the Year in February, 1993.) This support of MSP by the civic leaders seems to echo the literature that newspapers which, early in a conflict, oppose the industry, ultimately turn to support that industry position which reflects the stance of the community's power elite, despite the opposition from citizen groups.[41]

In one column, for example, Ted McManus wrote that protesters at a public hearing were "a small but vocal group" of "so-called agitators" paid by the HWTC which included members of SLAP and "others of that ilk."[42] Editor Steve Shirley, in a January 11, 1989, column, wrote that MSP owner Jack Kent, a self-taught engineer, "dazzles all the college-educated people he hires." The editor also wrote, "MSP has the answer," but it "can get no respect."[43] The local newspaper seems to have legitimized MSP and withheld legitimacy from the activist groups involved, namely SLAP and the HWTC.

Finally, the local press legitimized the local industry, and not its activist opponents, through positive framing in news stories during all stages of the "fragmented" community conflict.

Results suggest that the local press did frame MSP and activists differently and drew more attention to its position than the activists by citing more company sources. By framing MSP more positively than activists, the local press limited the information reaching its readers, information necessary to make informed decisions and state reasoned opinions in a community debate.

In some instances, the framing of this environmental conflict in favor of the industry was rather obvious. In others, it was more insidious. For instance, during the data collection it became apparent that MSP was usually mentioned in the lead or first few paragraphs of a story, while opponents like SLAP and the HWTC appeared later in the story, an observation supported by descriptive data analyses. Sometimes, after opponents' positions were presented, the newspaper returned to MSP's position with quotes and explanations from MSP sources, giving them the dominant position in the piece.

Nearly 10 years after its inception, MSP continues to prosper. Countless hearings, fines, lawsuits, and trials involving the company are now regarded as history, yet the controversy over the safety and legitimacy of the company's alleged recycling capabilities remains unresolved, and the community stands divided over its environmental impact.

Future research should attempt to replicate the present study in other states and communities--homogenous, pluralistic and, like the present one, fragmented in order to further test these findings, and compare coverage of activists and community leaders. We also recommend incorporating survey and interview data to expand upon the scope of the findings, while content analyzing other types of media coverage of such conflicts to determine what role, if any, they played in the conflict's development.

What this study suggests is that the forces of business and industry leaders have powerful ways in the face of environmental hazrd, and that the press in "fragmented" communities may succomb to the corporate line and become oblivious to the cause of environmental activists and the concerns they represent.

Notes

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[1] The term "fragmented" community here refers to a community with small in size, but high in pluralism.

[2] C. J. Bosso, "After the Movement: Environmental Activism in the 1990s," in *Environmental Policy in the 1990s*, 2nd ed., ed. N. J. Vig and M. E. Kraft (Washington, DC: CQ Press. 1994), 31.

[3] Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien, *Community Conflict and the* Press (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980), 139.

[4] N. C. Sharma, J. E. Kivlin, and F. C. Fliegel, "Environmental Pollution: Is There Enough Concern to Lead to Action?" *Environment and Behavior* 7 (1975): 455-471.

[5] Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, *Community Conflict.*

[6] Information sought on cancer incidences appeared since November 10, 1987; link alleged between childhood cancer and MSP in June 1988.

[7] Robert E. Park is considered to be a "founder of the sociological study of mass communication and public opinion and the field's first theorist." See P. Jean Frazier and Cecilie Gaziano, "Robert Ezra Park's Theory of News, Public Opinion and Social Control," *Journalism Monographs* 64 (November 1979), 1; Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

[8] Alex S. Edelstein, and J. Blaine Schulz, "The Weekly Newspaper's Leadership Role as Seen by Community Leaders: A Sociological Perspective," in *People, Society, and Mass Communications*, ed. Lewis Anthony Dexter and David Manning White (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 221-238; A. Viddich, and J. Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society: Class Power and Religion in a Rural Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[9] David L. Paletz, P. Reichert, and B. McIntyre, "How the Media Support Local Governmental Authority," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 35 (spring 1971): 80-92; G. Stone, and P. Mazza, "Impact of Consensus Theory on Community Newspaper Organization," *Journalism Quarterly* 54 (summer 1977): 313-319; Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, *Community Conflict*; Charles T. Salmon, and Jung-Sook Lee, "Perceptions of Newspaper Fairness: A Structural Approach," *Journalism Quarterly* 60 (winter 1983): 663-670.

[10] Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, *Community Conflict.*

[11] Larissa Grunig, "Activism: How It Limits the Effectiveness of Organizations and How Excellent Public Relations Departments Respond," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, ed. James E. Grunig (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 503-530.

[12] James E. Grunig, and T. Hunt, *Managing Public Relations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984), 266.

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[13] P. J. Trounstine, and T. Christensen, *Movers and Shakers: The Study of Community Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

[14] I. Sanders, *The Community: An Introduction to a Social System,* 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1966), 26.

[15] Clarice N. Olien, George A. Donohue, and Phillip J. Tichenor, "The Community Editor's Power and the Reporting of Conflict," *Journalism Quarterly* 45 (summer 1968): 243-252.

[16] See Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, *Community Conflict.*

[17] Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations.*

[18] James Coleman, *Community Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1957); Everett E. Dennis, "In Context: Environmentalism in the System of News," in *Media & the Environment,* eds. C. L. LaMay, and Everett E. Dennis (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1991), 55-64; George A. Donohue, Clarice N. Olien, and Phillip J. Tichenor, "Communities, Pollution, and Fight for Survival," *The Journal of Environmental Education* 6 (1974): 29-37; William F. Griswold, and Jill D. Swenson, "Not in Whose Backyard? The Ethics of Reporting Environmental Issues," *Mass Comm Review* 20 (1993): 62-75; Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien, "Community Research and Evaluating Community Relations," *Public Relations Review* 3 (1977): 96-109.

[19] A. Hansen, "The Media and the Social Construction of the Environment," *Media, Culture and Society* 13 (1991): 443-458; P. Kaniss, *Making Local News* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[20] Kaniss, *Making Local News,* 59.

[21] Pamela J. Shoemaker, and Elizabeth Kay Mayfield, "Building a Theory of News Content: A Synthesis of Current Approaches," *Journalism Monographs* 103 (June 1987), 1.

[22] David R. Bowers, "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions," *Journalism Quarterly* 44 (spring 1967): 43-52.

[23] Larissa Grunig, "Activism: How It Limits the Effectiveness of Organizations and How Excellent Public Relations Departments Respond," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management,* ed. James E. Grunig (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 503-530.

[24] John Soloski, "Sources and Channels of Local News," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (winter 1989): 864-870.

[25] Two reasons guided a census study instead of a representative sample. First, there was no complete and accurate index, of stories, editorials, opinion columns, letters to the editor, and advertisements involving MSP, available from which to draw a sample. The index available indicated about 386 items, primarily news, but mixed with some editorials and other items. We suspected that any sample drawn from this index might not be representative, since it appeared that

items indexed may have concentrated on the more controversial aspects of coverage. This condition, paired with a desire to conduct an inclusive, extensive case study of press coverage of this controversy, led us to conduct a census study. The U.S. Census Bureau has historically utilized a census or universe study in counting the population of the United States. Although not as common as sampling, other researchers have used universe or census in content analysis studies. Items about MSP appearing in *The Daily Review* for 1985 were not indexed, therefore it was necessary to review all editions of the newspaper for 1985 to locate and analyze the stories.

[26] The coding scheme was tested in a pilot study with a random sample of 32 news items found in the *New Orleans Times Picayune* index of MSP stories. The New Orleans newspaper was analyzed because it was indexed and available locally.

[27] Twenty cases (3 percent) were re-analyzed by the original coder, and another 3 percent by an independent coder, provided with written coding instructions and a brief training session. Both coders were graduate students in communication. A formula used by Paletz, Fozzard, and Ayanian and reported by Holsti was utilized to check reliability: R = 2Pab divided by Pa + Pb, where R is reliability, Pa is the number of observations by the first coder, Pb is the number of observations by the second coder, and Pab is the number of agreed-upon observations. See David L. Paletz, Peter A. Fozzard, and John Z. Ayanian, "The I.R.A., the Red Brigades, and the F.A.L.N. in the *New York Times*," *Journal of Communication* 32 (1982): 162-171; O. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

[28] Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor, *Community Conflict.*

[29] G. Black, "Conflict in the Community: A Theory of the Effects of Community Size," *The American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 1245-1261.

[30] Many researchers in sociology and communication identified stages in the development of conflict. Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, in *Community Press,* identified four primary stages of conflict which seem to be common to most community conflict: the initiation stage, the conflict definition stage, the public stage, and the legitimation stage. They acknowledged that other stages may occur depending upon the conflict. In a later study, the same research team identified three related but overlapping phases specific to the powerline controversy in Minnesota. They included the problem definition phase, the bureaucratic confrontation phase, and the demonstration confrontation phase. The present study utilized a combination of these conflict stages.

[31] MSP offered to accept the floating garbage barge, April 29, 1987.

[32] Claire E. Taylor, "Waste Burn Stand Needed," *The Daily Review*, 28 August 1985, 2.

[33] "Hazardous Waste Fire Scare Prompts Questions," *The Daily Review*, 8 April 1987, 2.

[34] Larry Wall, "Objectivity in Cancer Debate Hard to Maintain," *The Daily Review*, 11 November 1987, 2.

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[35] Gerald Hambleton, "Kettle Calling the Pot Black?" *The Daily Review*, 1 February 1989, 2.

[36] M. Fishman, *Manufacturing the News* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1980); Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979); E. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); A. Mazur, "Media Coverage and Public Opinion on Scientific Controversies," *Journal of Communication* 31 (1981): 106-115; H. Molotch and M. Lester, "Accidental News: The Great Oil Spill as Local Occurrence and National Event," *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1975): 235-260; H. Molotch, D. L. Protess, and M. T. Gordon, "The Media-Policy Connection: Ecologies of News," in *Political Communication Research: Approaches, Studies, Assessments*, ed. David L. Paletz (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1987), 26-48; Clarice N. Olien, Phillip J. Tichenor, and George A. Donohue, "Media Coverage and Social Movements," in *Information Campaigns: Balancing Social Values and Social Change*, ed. Charles T. Salmon (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 139-163; David L. Paletz, and Robert M. Entman, *Media, Power, Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1981); Leon Sigal, *Reporters and Officials: The Organization of Newsmaking* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1973); Eleanor Singer, and Phyllis Endreny, *Reporting on Risk* (New York: Plenum Press, 1993); Conrad Smith, "News Sources and Power Elites in News Coverage of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill," *Journalism Quarterly* 70 (summer 1993): 393-403; Soloski, "Sources and Channels," 864-870.

[37] Gans, 1979; Kaniss, 1991; Roloff, 1987; Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, *Community Conflict*.

[38] "Place for MSP is in Federal Court," *The Daily Review*, 16 June 1991, 2.

[39] "Toxic Waste Could Use a Better Push," *The Daily Review*, 23 August 1985, 2.

[40] "Work Together to Solve Hazardous Waste Problem," *The Daily Review*, 19 June 1987, 2.

[41] Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, *Community Conflict*.

[42] Ted McManus, "Another MSP Hearing Done," *The Daily Review*, 10 January 1992, 2.

[43] Steve Shirley, "Kent's Story Consistent," *The Daily Review*, 11 January 1989, 2.

The Impact of Beat Competition on City Hall Coverage

by

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Abstract

The Impact of Beat Competition on City Hall Coverage

The study used a survey of 232 newspaper city hall beat reporters about the impact of newspaper and television competition on their coverage. Newspaper competition was more likely to affect content than television competition, but television did have an impact on some reporters, especially in the absence of newspaper competition.

The most interesting results were the relationship between competition and reporter-editor interaction and the strong impact of this interaction on reporters' perceptions of content changes.

The Impact of Beat Competition on City Hall Coverage

The 1980s and 1990s saw a growth in research about newspaper competition. However, most of it concentrated on the economic competition that arises as two or more newspapers battle for readers and advertisers. Another form of competition occurs as reporters from different news organizations cover the same news events and beats. Lacy and Simon called this "sociological" competition to differentiate it from economic competition.[1] They said, "It appears that having another journalist working the same beat can push a reporter to do a better job."[2]

Despite the research done on economic competition, little research has explicitly examined the impact of sociological, or beat, competition. This study uses a survey of newspaper city hall beat reporters to explore the impact of newspaper and television news competition on their coverage of city hall.

City hall was selected for two reasons. First, by isolating a particular beat, the researchers were able to identify particular reporters to study. Second, city hall represents a beat that is central to journalism and its social mission. Historically, sociologists have considered newspapers among the most important community-building mechanisms in society.[3] Within this context, it stands to reason that local newspapers and reporters are an integral part of the concept of community and are shaped by civic culture as much as they, in turn, contribute to it.[4] As the centralized location for local political power, the city hall beat is an important source of local civic news.

Literature Review

Before examining the existing research about beat competition, a quick examination of economic competition research is useful. The majority of the studies of newspaper competition before the 1980s found little impact on content. Since the mid-1980s, however, the majority of articles have found a relationship between intensity of competition and the amount of money allocated to the newsroom.[5] The relationship between competition and expenditures is called the "financial commitment" model.[6]

No matter what the impact of competition, the nature of newspaper competition has changed during the past three decades. Only 10 cities continue to have separately owned and operated daily newspapers and another 15 cities have joint operating agreements.[7] The decline of intracity newspaper competition, however, has not eliminated all competition. Daily newspapers have extended their markets to counties or even larger geographic areas. One study found that 69 percent of all U.S. counties had two or more daily newspapers in 1988, and the mean number of dailies in these counties was 2.76.[8] There also is evidence that weeklies and dailies are increasingly competing for readers.[9]

Research into the impact of intercity competition among dailies found that as a daily's competitors increased their percentage of county penetration, the daily increased its newshole and the percentage of the newshole given to local news increased.[10] Another study found that as county penetration of competing dailies increased, reporters' workloads decreased and the percentage of controversial local stories that presented both sides of the controversy increased.

Other studies have connected newspaper competition with political activities. Lasorsa found that as the number of dailies in a county increased, the diversity of opinion held about public issues increased.[11] Diversity of public opinion dealt with the number of problems people thought were important to the country.

Vermeer found that the number of daily newspapers in a county was negatively related with the outcomes of elections for U.S. Senate and governor. Counties with more dailies had smaller margins of victory.[12] He found that the impact of multiple newspapers was stronger in open-seat elections than when incumbents were running.

Although the impact of beat competition on content has received little explicit study, the nature of beat coverage has been examined extensively. The exact relationship between reporters and their sources on beats can take on a variety of complex interactions.[13] Competition may influence source-reporter relations, but it can also have a variety of other effects on coverage and content. Duncan studied city hall coverage at weekly newspapers and concluded weeklies that had competition were more diligent and zealous in their city hall coverage than those that had no competition. He also concluded that reporters were more likely to be contentious with city officials if they had competition.[14]

The line between studies of economic and sociological competition is not always clear-cut. Although they did not differentiate between these two types of competition, Coulson and Lacy reported the responses of 423 journalists about the impact of competition on news coverage.[15] Of the respondents, 63 percent said competing newspapers provide higher quality local coverage than monopoly papers; 89 percent said competing dailies provide greater news diversity than monopoly papers; 79 percent said monopoly dailies are more likely to become complacent than competing dailies; and 62 percent said competing newspapers are more likely to sensationalize the news than monopoly dailies. Of the 423 journalists, 258 were reporters and 165 were editors. These two groups consistently showed different percentage-of-agreement levels, ranging from a difference of 3 percentage points to a 13 percentage point difference.

The Coulson and Lacy study also asked if the reporters thought broadcast media offered an acceptable local news alternative to newspaper competition. The responses varied by newspaper circulation size, with 38 percent of the journalists at newspapers under 40,000 saying yes, 35 percent of those at newspapers between 40,000 and 100,000 saying yes, and 30 percent of those at newspapers with more than 100,000 circulation saying yes. The differences in responses between editors and reporters only varied from 2 to 4 percentage points.

This study, however, asked general questions about the impact of competition that could reflect a variety of factors, including economic and sociological competition. The exploration of beat competition requires more explicit efforts to isolate its impact.

Research Questions

Because so little research is available about the impact of beat competition on coverage, this study addresses four research questions. They are:

1. To what degree and in what way do city hall reporters perceive newspaper competition affects newspaper coverage of city hall?

This question is based on the assumption that beat competition affects the behavior of at least some beat reporters. The answers to this question concern the degree and nature of these effects using the survey responses of city hall reporters. The study of weeklies mentioned above found an impact on this beat, but dailies have not been explored.[16]

2. To what degree and in what way do city hall reporters perceive television news competition affects newspaper coverage of city hall?

This question extends question 1 to competition between newspapers and television. The Coulson and Lacy survey of journalists about competition and coverage found that 30 percent or more said local television news is an acceptable alternative to newspaper competition,[17] but the impact of competition within the confines of a specific beat has not been explored.

3. Are editor-reporter discussions of newspaper competition's impact related to city hall reporters' perceptions of variations in news coverage?

Newspaper competition may have a direct effect on beat reporting, but it is also possible that this coverage is influenced by interaction between the editor and the reporter. For example, editors have input on the number, type and length of stories from all beats. They also control newsroom resources--money and journalists--that can affect coverage on the beat. In addition to their influence, research indicates that reporters and editors differ in their opinions and perceptions about how competition affects coverage.[18] It would seem that the interaction between journalists in these two positions might affect newspaper content.

This research question is represented by the path model in Figure 1. This simplified model suggests that increased competition on the beat is related to a greater likelihood that editors and reporters will discuss this competition (step 1). The possible impact of this discussion being connected to content is represented by step 3. The model also suggests a direct connection between beat competition and content (step 2).

4. Are editor-reporter discussions of television news competition's impact related to city hall reporters' perceptions of variations in news coverage?

This question is the same as research question 3 except it concerns television news competition with newspapers. The path model in Figure 1 also is applicable here.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Method

These research questions could be investigated with a variety of methods, such as surveys or content analysis. A national survey was selected because it would allow an examination of the behavior on the beat. Content analysis can only examine the results of these behaviors. Indeed, the results of this survey provide useful information for a future content analysis.

All newspapers located in the central city of the 214 television areas of dominant influence were selected for this survey. A researcher called each newspaper and asked for the names of reporters who cover city hall. The result was 312 reporters at 226 dailies. Each of these reporters was sent a questionnaire, and 232 returned questionnaires for a 74 percent response rate.

The survey took place in spring 1997 and used three waves. The first wave included a questionnaire, a letter and a return envelope. The second wave was a post card reminding the reporters of the earlier questionnaire and telling them they would receive another questionnaire in about two weeks if they had lost or thrown the previous one away. The third wave was the same as the first and followed the post card by about two weeks.

Most questions involve seven-point Likert-type scales that allowed responses to statements. The responses ranged from strongly disagree, which received a one, to strongly agree, which received a seven. Circulation figures were taken from the *Editor & Publisher International Year Book 1997.*[19]

Answers to research questions 1 and 2 were based on proportions of respondents replying to questions about five possible effects of competition on content. These questions are given below. Open-ended responses also were examined to find perceived influences on city hall coverage that were not anticipated with close-ended questions. Because the population was a census of all city hall reporters in these markets, no inferential statistics were used.

Research questions 3 and 4 were answered with least-squares multiple regression analysis applied to the path model in Figure 1. The dependent variables for the analysis of newspaper competition were responses to the following questions about newspaper competition:

- My supervising editor and I discuss how competition from newspapers affects our coverage of city government.
- Newspaper competition increases how many city government news stories I write.
- Newspaper competition makes it harder for me to find time to do in-depth news stories about city government.
- Newspaper competition makes me report city government stories I don't think are important.
- Newspaper competition makes me report important city government news I otherwise might have missed.
- Newspaper competition makes me sensationalize city government news.

Similar questions were used to analyze television news competition, but the term "newspaper competition" was replaced with the term "television news competition."

The independent variables included the question about reporter and editor interaction, circulation size of the newspaper, time spent on the beat by the reporter, the number of daily newspapers covering the city hall beat every day, the number of television news operations covering the city hall beat every day, and the number of weekly newspapers covering city hall. The last three variables were used as measures of competition, and circulation and time on the beat were used as control variables. Circulation has been found to be related to news content.[20] In another study, beat experience was negatively related to dependence on beat sources for story ideas. As time spent on the beat increased, reporters were more likely to develop stories using their own initiative.[21]

Data were examined to see if they fit the assumptions of multiple regression. Circulation, number of dailies covering city hall on a daily basis, time spent on the beat, and number of television news departments covering city hall on a daily basis all showed skewness figures greater than 1 and had outliers.[22] The outliers were reassigned the value of three standard deviations from the mean to reduce the influence of the outliers but to retain the cases. This reduced the skewness, but circulation and time spent on the beat continued to have skewness figures close to 2. One way of correcting for skewness is to use the natural log of the cases. This was done, but the increase in the coefficient of determination (multiple R-squared) was minimal and none of the conclusions would have been changed by use of logged data. So, the regressions were run with the original data.

Residuals for the regression equations were examined. While the normalized residuals and predicted values were not perfectly normal,[23] the fact that this study was not making inference made the variation here acceptable.

This study assumes that newspaper reporters' perceptions of how competition affects their behavior are somewhat valid representations of reality. While there is certainly measurement error involved, it seems logical that reporters should have some idea of how their decisions are connected to external factors. This assumption underlies the use of many if not most surveys about behavior.

Results

The average circulation of the responding reporters' newspapers was 167,178, the median was 70,974, and the size ranged from 5,021 to 1,071,120. The sample over-represented larger newspapers because it concentrated on television market central cities. This is acceptable because results indicated large cities are more likely to have newspaper competition on the city hall beat.

The average age of the responding reporters was about 35 years, with a range of 20 to 79 years. Average newspaper experience was 11.5 years, with an average of 6.7 years at the current newspaper. Reporters had spent an average of 3.5 years working the city hall beat, with a range from one month to 55 years. Of the respondents, 60 percent were men and 40 percent were women.

Extent of Competition

Of the 232 respondents, 90 (38.8 percent) said at least one other daily covered their city hall beat. Of these, 75 said at least one daily covered the beat every day. Fourteen of the 75 reporters who had daily competition competed with reporters from more than one daily.

Circulation size was correlated with number of dailies covering the city hall beat. The Pearson's r for these variables equaled .50.

The number of weeklies covering a city hall also varied with circulation size, although the correlation was not as great as with daily competition. The Pearson's r equaled .246. Reporters at newspapers under 40,000 competed with an average of .72 weeklies. Reporters at papers between 40,000 and 100,000 circulation said an average of 1.12 weeklies covered the city hall beat, and reporters at newspapers with more than 100,000 circulation competed with an average of 2.41 weeklies. These figures reflect the growth during the past two decades of weekly newspapers, particularly "alternative weeklies" in large cities.

Not surprisingly, larger newspapers faced greater competition from television news, with reporters at papers with more than 100,000 circulation saying an average of 1.89 stations covered their beat on a daily basis. This was greater than competition in smaller markets. Because most of the larger markets have three or more television news operations, these results indicate that many television news operations do not cover city hall daily.

Impact of Newspaper Competition

Research question 1 asked to what degree and in what way newspaper competition affects coverage of city hall. Table 1 shows the responses of the 75 reporters who had another daily newspaper covering their city hall every day to five closed-ended questions about competition and content.[24]

Overall, the majority of reporters who face daily competition perceived that it had some impact on their behavior and their content. From a reader's perspective, these effects have both advantages and disadvantages. When the three "agree" categories (somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) are summed, 69 percent of the reporters agreed that daily newspaper competition increased the number of city hall stories they wrote, and 66 percent agreed that daily newspaper competition made it hard to find time to do in-depth stories about city hall.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Fifty-four percent agreed that daily newspaper competition made them cover stories they might have missed, and 51 percent said daily newspaper competition made them cover unimportant stories. Only 15 percent agreed that daily newspaper competition made them sensationalize stories.

Responses on Open-ended Questions. When newspaper reporters spoke positively about newspaper competition and coverage of city government, they emphasized that competition fosters a sense of urgency and timeliness in news reporting while it makes journalists work harder, sharpens judgment, fuels aggressiveness, stimulates productivity, and enriches the public's information environment.

For beat reporters, negative aspects of competition included the fear of being beaten on a major story by another newspaper, of being told by editors to chase stories of marginal news value, of not having adequate time for in-depth reporting, of having less time to enterprise creative ideas, of being taken off the beat to cover stories not related to city government, of inadequate display space relative to other news, and of becoming a surrogate assignment editor for television news.

Journalists who competed with reporters from other newspapers often emphasized the strategy of finding new angles. New angles may include a second-day lead, adding to what is known about the story, more sources, more depth, more background, and more context.

Impact of Television Competition

Research question 2 asked to what degree and in what ways television news competition affects coverage of city hall. Data in Table 2 indicate a much smaller impact from daily television competition than from daily newspaper competition. When the three agree categories were summed, 28 percent of the 123 reporters who had TV covering their beat daily said television news competition increased the number of stories they wrote, which was considerably less than the 69 percent who said newspaper competition increased the number of stories they wrote.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Only 14 percent said television news competition makes it harder to find time to do in-depth stories, which was 52 percentage points below the responses on the same question about daily newspaper competition. Twenty-nine percent said television news competition makes them write stories they think are unimportant, and 19 percent said television news competition makes them report stories they would have otherwise missed. These are both lower than the responses for daily newspaper competition on the same questions, but the difference between the newspaper and television competition for unimportant stories is 22 percentage points, and the difference on missed stories is 35 percentage points.

As with daily newspaper competition, few reporters thought that television news competition makes them sensationalize the news. Only 6 percent agreed with this statement, which is even lower than the 15 percent who agreed about newspaper competition.

Responses to open-ended questions. Many print journalists questioned whether they are in direct competition with television and tended to dismiss television stories about city government as trivial and shallow. They said they resent editors who ask them to follow television stories. They emphasized thoroughness and context as their preferred responses to television competition. Most newspaper journalists said television competition has little effect on how they use their time, but they expressed frustration when television uses information they develop and broadcasts it to the public as its own reporting.

The Impact of Editor and Reporter Interaction

Research question 3 asked about the impact of reporter and editor interactions on the reporters' perception of how daily newspaper competition affects coverage. This question was answered using a series of multiple regression analyses to test the path model in Figure 1. Step 1 in that model was to see if the number of daily and weekly newspapers that cover a city hall was related to the likelihood of discussion between editor and reporter about how competition affects their coverage.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The first equation in Table 3 shows a relatively strong positive relationship between the number of daily newspapers covering city hall every day and agreement that newspaper competition results in the editor and reporter discussing the impact of that competition. The entire equation explained about 25 percent of the variation in responses to this question, and the number of dailies covering city hall on a daily basis was the only variable that had a strong relationship with this question (beta=.510). The newspaper's circulation, number of weeklies covering the beat, and years on the beat explained very little of the variation in responses

Step 2 represents a direct relationship between the number of daily and weekly newspapers covering city hall and reporters' perceptions of competition's impact on coverage. The equations in Table 3 show that the number of weeklies covering a city hall beat was not related in any significant degree with responses to any of the five content questions.[25] However, the number of dailies covering city hall every day did explain an important part of the variance in all equations, ranking behind editor and reporter discussion of competition as the second most important variable in the equations.

In all the equations, the number of daily newspapers covering city hall on a daily basis was positively related to reporters' perceptions of content and coverage. As the number of dailies covering the city hall beat increased (the impacts are ranked in order of strength of relationship), it became more difficult to find time for in-depth stories, the number of city hall stories increased, more unimportant stories were likely to be written, sensationalism was likely to increase, and reporters were more likely to write stories they might have missed without competition.

Step 3 deals with the impact of editor and reporter interaction on content. The more competition led to discussion, the greater was the relationship between reporter-editor interaction and the reporters' perceptions of competition's impact on coverage and content. This variable was the most important in explaining variation in responses about content. As competition led to more reporter-editor discussion (in order of strength of relationship), more stories were written, more unimportant stories were written, there was less time for in-depth stories, more stories that might have been missed were reported, and news was more likely to be sensationalized.

The overall amount of variance explained by the equations equaled 32.6 percent for number of stories, 30.7 percent for lack of time for in-depth stories, 23.6 percent for reporting stories that might have been missed, 21.5 percent for reporting unimportant stories, and 14.9 percent for sensationalizing the news about city hall.

Of the control variables, circulation was related negatively to increases in the number of stories, lack of time to do in-depth stories, and making the reporter cover unimportant stories. There was a slight negative relationship between circulation and competition making the reporter sensationalize stories. The first two relationships reflect the greater resources at larger circulation dailies. With a larger staff, a city hall reporter could receive help, thus increasing the time to do in-depth stories and reducing the number of stories he or she must do. This is consistent with the finding in another study that the ratio of space to reporter increases as circulation size decreases.[26]

The other two relationships probably represent the different content emphases found at larger and smaller newspapers. Gladney concluded that newspapers share some values despite size, but he also found that evaluation of quality did vary with circulation size.[27]

The years a reporter had spent on the city hall beat had no important relationship with the reporters' perceptions of competition's impact on coverage.

Research question 4 concerns the application of Figure 1 to competition between newspapers and television news departments. The equations reported in Table 4 test this relationship. In these equations, the number of weekly newspapers covering city hall was dropped because it had no impact in equations given in Table 3.[28] The number of television stations covering city hall on a daily basis was included in the regression equations as a measure of television competition.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Step 1 in Figure 1 was not supported for television news competition. A positive relationship was found between number of television news departments covering city hall and the likelihood that newspaper editors and reporters would discuss this type of competition, but the entire equation accounted for only 7.6 percent of variance. In this equation, years on the beat had a greater impact than number of television stations, and the number of dailies covering the beat every day had only a slightly smaller negative impact. The data also indicate that as years on the beat increased, reporters were less likely to discuss television competition with editors, and as the number of competing dailies increased, reporters were less likely to discuss television competition with editors.

Step 2 in Figure 1, which states that an increase in the number of television stations covering city hall would be related to content, was not supported. The number of daily newspapers covering city hall was of equal or greater importance than the number of television stations in all but one equation, and in that one (television competition makes me report stories I might have missed) neither of these competitive variables was important.

Step 3 in Figure 1 received strong support, with the interaction of reporters and editors being the most influential variable in explaining responses to content questions. As the likelihood of reporters and editors discussing television competition increased, the number of stories written increased, the reporting of unimportant stories increased, not having enough time for in-depth stories increased, sensationalizing city hall stories increased, and reporters were more likely to report stories they might have missed without television competition.

The results regarding step 3 for television competition are consistent with the results for newspaper competition. However, the amounts of variance accounted for by the equations are considerably smaller with television than newspapers for all but two content variables. In one of these two situations, interaction of reporter and editor with regard to television competition explained 36.4 percent of variation in number of stories as a result of television competition, and 32.6 percent of variation in number of stories that result from newspaper competition. The variation in responses to "competition makes me report unimportant stories" was about equal for both television and newspaper competition.

The second most important variable explaining variance in the equations in Table 4 was number of daily newspapers covering city hall every day. When newspaper competition increased, reporters were less likely to say television competition was affecting coverage. In other words, television competition was more likely to have an impact on content when daily newspaper competition was absent.

Discussion

If competition is defined as having one or more other news organizations cover city hall, most daily newspaper city hall reporters have competition. However, the level and perceived impact of that competition varies greatly. Reporters reported that weekly competition had little impact on news content, but when another daily covered city hall, it was likely that newspaper coverage was affected. Television competition had an impact in a small percentage of the markets. For example, 28 percent of the reporters said television competition increased how many stories they wrote. However, the percentage of journalists reporting an impact varied with the type of content. Television competition was more likely to affect content when the reporter did not face competition from another newspaper.

The most important variable in explaining the variations in responses about competition affecting content was the likelihood that reporters and editors discuss the competition. This variable had the strongest relationship for both newspaper and television competition, and it was more likely to occur as the number of dailies covering city hall increased. It was not related to the number of television stations covering city hall.

The greatest impact of this reporter-editor interaction was on number of stories. As editors and reporters discussed television and newspaper competition, reporters were likely to write more stories. This result is consistent with research on economic competition. The positive relationship between number of stories and competition is consistent with findings that intercity competition increases the percentage of newshole given to local stories.[29]

Newspaper competition had a direct relationship with responses about competition and content, as well as an indirect effect through editor and reporter interaction. Television competition only worked through this interaction, and that relationship was much weaker than the one involving newspaper competition.

On the basis of these responses, one would conclude that competition can have positive and negative effects. Competition and editor-reporter discussion of competition led to more stories about city hall, which could be conceived as positive, but this increase in stories appears to be connected to a reduction in time to do in-depth stories, which could be seen as a negative. However, this negative impact is not just related to competition. These two effects are less likely to occur at larger newspapers, which indicates that content produced by reporters at newspapers with greater resources is less affected by competition.

Competition and reporter-editor interaction were related to reporters saying competition made them cover stories they would have missed without competition, but these variables also led to reporting unimportant stories. The likelihood of reporting unimportant stories declined with size of circulation.

Finally, competition and reporter-editor interaction were related with sensationalizing city hall news, but the extent of competition's impact on sensationalism was relatively small. This may reflect the difficulty of sensationalizing a city's bureaucracy. Other beats, such as police, might be easier to sensationalize.

Conclusions

Beat competition, also called "sociological competition," does have an impact on content about city hall, at least as perceived by the reporters covering this beat. Newspaper competition appears more likely to affect content than television news competition, but television can have an impact on some reporters, especially in the absence of newspaper competition.

Competition's impact is not all positive because it is related to less time for in-depth stories, reporting stories that reporters consider unimportant (although these same stories may be important to readers and editors), and, to a lesser degree, an increase in sensationalism of city hall news. On the positive side, competition increases the number of stories and makes reporters cover stories they otherwise might have missed. It also results in reporters digging for new angles on stories reported by competitors. These angles are presented in the greater number of stories being published.

Perhaps the most interesting results are the strong relationship between competition and reporter-editor interaction and the impact of this interaction on reporters' perceptions of coverage. It appears that editors have a great deal of influence on how competition affects city hall coverage.

Reporters still cover as they think best, but interaction affects the events and issues reporters will call news.

Whatever the relationship between competition and content, it also is related to the circulation of the newspaper involved. As circulation increases, reporters were less likely to agree with the statements about competition's influence on content.

This study of beat competition is consistent with existing research and begins to open this area for continued research. In-depth study of how reporters react to other reporters on beats and how editors and reporters interact about competition would be interesting. Do the reporting skills of competing reporters affect how they cover a beat? Do the editors dominate the interaction between reporters and themselves? How much freedom do reporters have in reacting to beat competition? Under what conditions does sensationalism occur on city hall beats? How do reporters who reported an impact of television competition on content vary from those who reported no impact?

The validity of these findings awaits testing through content analysis. Are the perceptions of these reporters about the impact on content consistent with more objective analyses of content?

Of course, this study could be expanded to other beats to see if competition affects behavior and content. Does competition affect coverage of the education, courts, police and fire beats? Does competition have a different impact on topic beats, such as the environmental beat, than on traditional organization beats?

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[1] Stephen Lacy and Todd F. Simon, *The Economics and Regulation of United States Newspapers* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1993), 106-107.

[2] Lacy and Simon, *Economics and Regulation*, 106.

[3] Robert E. Park, "The Natural History of the Newspaper," in Wilbur Schramm, ed., *Mass Communication*, 2d. ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1975): 8-23.

[4] Maxwell McCombs, "Newspaper and the Civic Culture," *Newspaper Research Journal* 4 (summer 1983): 5-9.

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[5] For a listing and brief review of this research, visit the financial commitment bibliography at Robert Picard's media economics Web site, (www5.fullerton.edu/titian/commecon/homepage.htm).

[6] The approach was first named in Barry R. Litman and Janet Bridges, "An Economic Analysis of Daily Newspaper Performance," *Newspaper Research Journal* 7 (spring 1986): 9-26 and was made more formal in Stephen Lacy, "The Financial Commitment Approach to News Media Competition," *The Journal of Media Economics* 5 (summer 1992): 5-21.

[7] The separately owned and operated figures come from *Editor and Publisher International Year Book 1997* (New York: Editor & Publisher, 1997). Joint operating agreements occur when two dailies in the same city combine all their business operations but maintain separate newsrooms. Seventeen cities were listed with JOAs early in 1998 in David C. Coulson and Stephen Lacy, "Newspapers and Joint Operating Agreements," in W. David Sloan and Emily Erickson Hoff, eds. *Contemporary Media Issues* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 1998): 206, but the JOAs in Nashville and El Paso closed during 1998.

[8] Stephen Lacy and Lucinda Davenport, "Daily Newspaper Market Structure, Concentration and Competition," *The Journal of Media Economics* 7:3 (1994): 33-46.

[9] Stephen Lacy and Shikha Dalmia, "Daily and Weekly Penetration in Non-Metropolitan Areas of Michigan," *Newspaper Research Journal* 12 (summer & fall 1993): 20-33.

[10] Stephen Lacy, "The Impact of Intercity Competition on Daily Newspaper Content," *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (summer 1988): 399-406.

[11] Dominic Lasorsa, "Effects of Newspaper Competition on Public Opinion Diversity," *Journalism Quarterly* 68 (spring/summer, 1991): 38-47.

[12] Jan P. Vermeer, "Multiple Newspapers and Electoral Competition: A County-Level Analysis," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 72 (spring 1995): 98-105.

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[13] For a discussion of the research into beat reporters and sources, see Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, 2d. ed. (New York: Longman, 1996): 105-137.

[14] Charles T. Duncan, "How the Weekly Press Covers News of Local Government," *Journalism Quarterly* 29 (summer 1952): 283-293.

[15] David C. Coulson and Stephen Lacy, "Journalists' Perceptions of How Newspaper and Broadcast News Competition Affect Newspaper Coverage," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73 (summer 1996): 354-363.

[16] Duncan, "Weekly Press Covers."

[17] Coulson and Lacy, "Journalists' Perceptions."

[18] David C. Coulson, "Impact of Ownership on Newspaper Quality," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (summer 1994): 403-410; and Coulson and Lacy, "Journalists' Perceptions."

[19] *Editor & Publisher International Year Book.*

[20] Stephen Lacy and James M. Bernstein, "Daily Newspaper Content's Relationship to Publication Cycle and Circulation Size," *Newspaper Research Journal* 9 (spring 1988): 49-57.

[21] Stephen Lacy and David Matustik, "Dependence on Organization and Beat Sources for Story Ideas: A Case Study of Four Newspapers," *Newspaper Research Journal* 5 (winter 1983): 9-16.

[22] Outliers were defined as cases with values greater or less than three standard deviations from the mean. In all cases, the outliers were on the positive side of this range.

[23] This comparison showed patterns that are often found when Likert-type scales are used. The residuals are not normally distributed because these scales result in limited variation in case values. Because this regression analysis is not making inference and regression is fairly robust with respect to this violation, the differences from normality are not likely to affect the conclusions of this study.

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[24] These 75 reporters were used to answer this question because they have more direct experience with the issue being addressed. The 15 reporters who reported other dailies covering city hall on a less than daily basis were dropped here. Their responses indicated that there was an impact, but it was not as great as with daily coverage. The following are the mean responses, respectively, of reporters with daily competition and those who had less than daily competition: increases stories, daily=4.84, less than daily=4.20; makes it harder to find time for in-depth stories, daily=4.8, less than daily=4.0; makes me publish unimportant stories, daily=3.92, less than daily=3.47; makes me report on news I might have missed, daily=4.15, less than daily=3.27; makes me sensationalize, daily=2.43, less than daily=1.73. The number of respondents to each question varies from 75 because of missing data.

[25] The data used for equations in Table 3 include all journalists who said they had another daily covering city hall, whether that coverage was daily or fewer times during the week.

[26] Lacy and Bernstein, "Daily Newspaper Content," 53.

[27] George A. Gladney, "Newspaper Excellence: How Editors of Small & Large Papers Judge Quality," *Newspaper Research Journal* 11 (spring 1990): 58-72.

[28] Data in Table 4 include all journalists who said a TV station covered their beat, whether that coverage was daily or fewer times per week.

[29] Lacy, "Impact of Intercity."

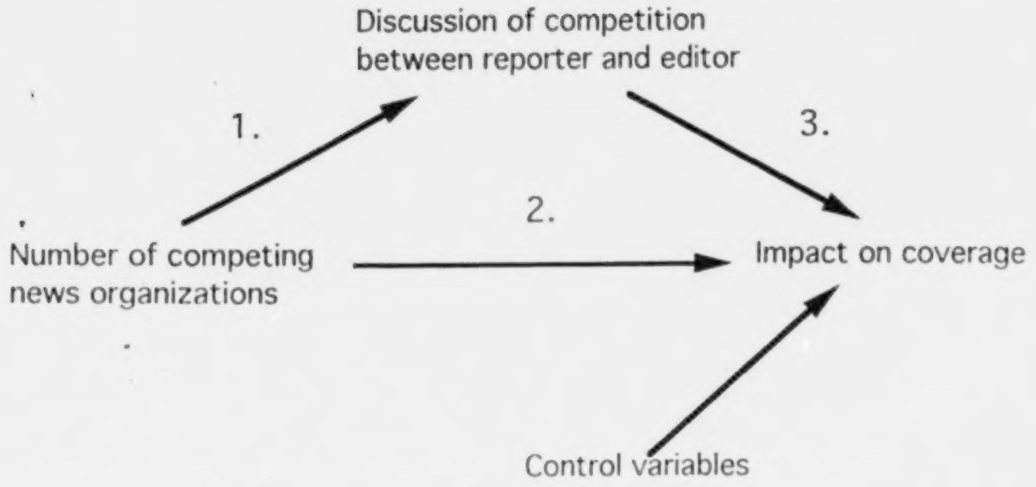
Discussion of competition between reporter and editor
1.
3.
2.
Number of competing news organizations
Impact on coverage
Control variables

Figure 1: Path model for the impact of beat competition on news coverage of city hall

Table 1

The Impact of Newspaper Competition on City Hall Covrage

Responses	"Newspaper competition:				
	increases how many news stories I write."	makes it harder for me to find time for in-depth stories about city govt."	makes me report city govt. stories I don't think are important."	makes me report city govt. news I otherwise might have missed."	makes me sensationalize city government news."
Strongly disagree	8%	7%	16%	14%	42%
Disagree	9%	9%	12%	7%	19%
Somewhat disagree	9%	9%	18%	17%	12%
Not sure	5%	9%	3%	8%	12%
Somewhat agree	21%	19%	27%	28%	11%
Agree	26%	28%	16%	19%	4%
Strongly agree	22%	19%	8%	7%	0%
Mean	4.84	4.80	3.92	4.15	2.43
N	74	74	74	72	74

Table 2

The Impact of Television News Competition on City Hall Coverage

Responses	"Competition from local television stations:				
	increases how many city govt. stories I write."	makes it harder for me to find time for in-depth city govt. news stories"	makes me report city govt. stories I don't think are important."	makes me report city govt. news I otherwise might have missed."	makes me sensationalize city government news."
Strongly disagree	26%	41%	33%	37%	54%
Disagree	25%	28%	20%	24%	26%
Somewhat disagree	16%	15%	13%	15%	9%
Not sure	5%	2%	5%	5%	5%
Somewhat agree	18%	9%	18%	15%	3%
Agree	3%	3%	9%	2%	2%
Strongly agree	7%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Mean	3.00	2.28	2.92	2.52	1.85
N	123	123	123	123	123

Table 3

Beta Weights for Path Model in Figure 1 for Newspaper Competition

Dependent Variables[a]

Independent variables	Editor & reporter discuss impact of paper's competition	NP competition increases the # of stories I write	NP competition makes it hard to find time for in-depth stories	NP competition makes me report unimportant stories	NP competition makes me report stories I might have missed	NP competition makes me sensationalize city hall news
Editor & reporter discuss impact of paper's competition	Not applicable	.442	.356	.389	.311	.285
Years on city hall beat	-.024	-.039	-.005	.021	-.018	-.022
Paper's Circulation	.013	-.188	-.185	-.219	-.066	-.129
Number of weeklies covering city hall	-.051	-.015	-.059	-.145	.101	-.129
Number of dailies covering city hall	.510	.273	.359	.215	.186	.196
R-squared	.251	.326	.307	.215	.236	.149
Degrees of freedom	4,148	5,147	5,111	5,147	5,145	5,147

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[a] All dependent variables were measured by responses on a seven-point scale from strongly disagree equaling one and strongly agree equaling seven.

Table 4

Beta Weights for Path Model in Figure 1 for Television Competition

Dependent Variables[a]

Independent variables	Editor & reporter discuss impact of paper's competition	TV competition increases the # of stories I write	TV competition makes it hard to find time for in-depth stories	TV competition makes me report unimportant stories	TV competition makes me report stories I might have missed	TV competition makes me sensationalize city hall news
Editor & reporter discuss impact of paper's competition	Not applicable	.508	.380	.400	.224	.270
Years on city hall beat	-.190	-.010	.129	.073	.021	.137
Paper's Circulation	-.041	-.127	-.014	-.109	-.117	-.109
Number of TV stations covering city hall daily	.151	.119	.021	.076	.074	.074
Number of dailies covering city hall	-.139	-.178	-.193	-.149	-.054	.092
R-squared	.076	.364	.192	.219	.077	.092
Degrees of freedom	4,188	5,187	5,187	5,187	5,187	5,187

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[a] All dependent variables were measured by responses on a seven-point scale from strongly disagree equaling one and strongly agree equaling seven.

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF MEDICINE:

A Survey of Editors and Cardiac Surgeons

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NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF MEDICINE:

A Survey of Editors and Cardiac Surgeons

ABSTRACT

Forty-four newspapers offer health-science sections, and millions of Americans rely on newspapers as their number one source of medical information. Daily newspaper editors and cardiac surgeons were surveyed about newspaper coverage of medicine. Cardiac surgeons gave newspapers a much lower accuracy rating than editors ($p = .000$). Cardiac surgeons responded more often than editors that newspapers sensationalize stories ($p = .000$). In conclusion, there are significant differences in perceptions between editors and cardiac surgeons about newspaper coverage of medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Americans rate science articles as one of the most interesting features published in daily newspapers (Nunn 1979). Reader interest in science is growing, with young adults, in particular, favoring more science-related coverage (Nunn 1979; Patterson 1982). Eighty-one of the 1,700 daily newspapers published in the United States offer weekly science pages (Culliton 1987; Erickson, McKenna, and Romano 1990). At least 44 U.S. newspapers offer health-science sections (Gellert, Higgins, Farley, and Lowery 1994).

In fact, millions of Americans rely on daily newspapers as their number one source for medical information. One study demonstrates that 79% of women obtain information about breast implants from newspapers, compared with 11% who talk to a physician or nurse (Vanderford, Smith, and Olive 1995). Nearly 67% of Americans rely on newspapers or television stations for food nutrition information, compared with 49% for doctors (Lichter and Amundson 1996). Sixty-five percent of Americans obtain cancer information from newspapers, and the mass media are the leading source of cancer information (Freimuth, Greenberg, DeWitt, and Romano 1984).

However, the accuracy of medical news in daily newspapers remains questionable. Wilkes and Kravitz (1992) report that researchers who publish manuscripts in the Journal of the American Medical Association and The New England Journal of Medicine believe that news reports based on their research are factual. Eighty-six percent of researchers assert that the news reports are accurate, while just 3% say the reports are inaccurate (Wilkes and Kravitz 1992).

Moreover, a survey of hospital chief executive officers (CEOs) reveals generally positive views of daily newspapers (Anderson 1991). Seventy-three percent of the CEOs respond that news stories portray their comments accurately and thoroughly. In addition, 18% of the CEOs believe that coverage of hospital and health-care issues in the local print media is excellent, 51% say the coverage is good, 24% assert that the coverage is fair, and just 6% say the coverage is poor (Anderson 1991).

Public-health officers, in contrast, believe that media coverage of medicine is deeply flawed (Gellert, Higgins, Lowery, and Maxwell 1994). Eighty percent of health officers maintain that the media could frequently or always be more scientifically knowledgeable (Gellert, Higgins, Lowery, and Maxwell 1994). Public-health officers estimate that only 52-73% of interviews are accurately reported.

A literature review identified many studies that analyze scientists' perceptions about the accuracy of science articles in newspapers. However, these studies generally contain three limitations: 1. an overemphasis on science coverage in the elite daily newspapers, i.e., The New York Times; 2. these studies examine the perceptions of all scientists, with physicians constituting only a small percentage of the study population; 3. physicians' views are not contrasted against editors' views.

The objective was to compare the perceptions of daily newspaper editors and cardiac surgeons about the accuracy of medical stories in daily newspapers. We began with two research questions: Do large newspapers and small-medium newspapers differ in their approaches to newspaper coverage of medicine? Do editors believe that medical stories are more accurate than cardiac surgeons?

METHODS

Surveys were sent to editors at the 83 daily newspapers in Pennsylvania and to the 177 cardiac surgeons listed in the 1995 report, "A Consumer Guide to Coronary Artery Bypass Graft Surgery." Two follow-up mailings were sent to improve the study's response rate. The surveys were sent to only the senior editor listed in the 1995 edition of Editor & Publisher. At almost all newspapers, the surveys were sent to the editor. However, a few small newspapers had a managing editor or an associate editor overseeing the editorial operations. Newspapers with Joint Operating Arrangements were considered separate newspapers, while publishing companies with separate morning and evening papers that were produced by the same editorial staff were considered one newspaper. Newspapers with circulations under 50,000 were classified as small-medium dailies, and newspapers with circulations over 50,000 were classified as large dailies.

The bypass grafting report, which publishes physician-specific mortality data, receives widespread coverage in daily newspapers (Ankney 1996). This physician group was chosen for its high newspaper exposure and because the surgeons resided throughout Pennsylvania, giving them exposure to almost all daily newspapers in the commonwealth. All respondents were guaranteed strict confidentiality to reduce the possibility of obtaining a socially desirable response set. Five-point Likert scales were used. Chi square analyses and Student's t tests were performed to measure differences in the perceptions of large newspaper editors versus small newspaper editors and editors versus cardiac surgeons about newspaper coverage of medicine.[1]

RESULTS

Forty-five of 83 editors (54%) responded to the survey. Thirty-three editors (73%) worked for small-medium daily newspapers, while 12 editors (27%) represented large daily newspapers. Table 1 shows the number of medical stories printed each week in daily newspapers. Large newspapers publish more medical stories than small newspapers (Chi square = 10.466, degrees of freedom = 4, p = .033).

Table 2 demonstrates which reporters cover medical stories at daily newspapers. Large newspapers are more likely to have medical-science reporters cover medical stories than small newspapers, which rely on general-assignment reporters (Chi square = 5.786, degrees of freedom = 1, p = .016).

Editors were asked to rate the accuracy of their newspaper's coverage of medical stories on a 1 (highly inaccurate) to 5 (highly accurate) scale. The average editor response was 3.93. Thirty of 43 respondents (70%) rated their coverage a 4 or 5. Ten respondents (23%) rated their coverage a 3. Only three respondents (7%) rated their coverage a 1 or 2. When asked if coverage of medical issues would be more accurate if physicians were willing to spend more time with reporters, 31 (70%) said yes, six (14%) said no, and seven (16%) were unsure.

Furthermore, only two of 44 respondents (5%) believed that newspaper reporters who cover medicine should be required to take college courses in epidemiology, research design, biology, and chemistry. Thirty-three editors (75%) opposed this requirement, while nine (20%) were unsure.

Only eight of 43 respondents (19%) reported that their newspaper has provided additional training or education to their reporter who covers medicine. When asked should newspapers provide additional training or education to assist reporters who cover medicine, 28 (64%) said yes, eight (18%) said no, and eight (18%) were unsure. However, most editors were unwilling to pay for this training. Seventeen editors (45%) said they were unwilling to spend any money to educate their reporters. Twelve editors (32%) said they would spend $1 to $249, three editors (8%) said they would spend $250 to $499, two editors (5%) said they would spend $500 to $749, and one editor (3%) said he would spend $750 to $999. Three editors (8%) said they would spend $1,000 or more to educate their reporters.

Editors strongly opposed voluntary accreditation for reporters who cover medicine. Only one respondent (2%) supported accreditation, 39 (89%) opposed it, and four (9%) were unsure. Editors also opposed allowing physicians to review complicated material for accuracy. Only one editor (2%) reports that his or her newspaper always allows physicians to review material for accuracy. Five editors (11%) said that physicians are allowed to review material most of the time, 13 editors (30%) said that physicians are allowed to review material some of the time, and eight editors (18%) said that physicians are rarely allowed to review material. Seventeen editors (39%) said that physicians are never allowed to review articles for accuracy.

Editors acknowledge that there is some sensationalism associated with medical journalism. One editor (2%) said that newspapers sensationalize medical stories most of the time. Twenty-four editors (56%) said that newspapers sensationalize medical stories some of the time, while 15 editors (35%) said that newspapers rarely sensationalize medical stories. Just three editors (7%) said that newspapers never sensationalize medical stories. When asked are daily newspapers biased toward negative medical stories, 12 editors (29%) said some of the time, 18 editors (44%) said rarely, and 11 editors (27%) said never.

Sixteen editors (37%) said that their newspaper's relationships with physicians were adversarial some of the time. Twenty-three (53%) reported that their relationships with physicians were rarely adversarial, while four (9%) said that their relations with physicians were never adversarial. Overall, large newspaper editors felt that their relationships with physicians were more adversarial than small newspaper editors. Eight of the 12 large newspaper editors (67%) believed that their relations with physicians were adversarial some of the time, compared with nine of the 33 small newspaper editors (27%). This difference approached, but did not reach, statistical significance (t = 1.91, degrees of freedom = 42, p = .063).

Surveys were delivered to 152 of the 177 cardiac surgeons (86%). Twenty-five surveys were returned because the surgeon had moved to a new position, and no forwarding address was available. Forty-seven of 152 cardiac surgeons (31%) returned the survey. As expected, the cardiac surgeons had a high newspaper exposure. Fifteen cardiac surgeons (34%) said that, on average, they are interviewed once a year. Fourteen surgeons (32%) reported that they are interviewed for two to five articles per year, while one surgeon (2%) said he is interviewed for 11 to 15 articles per year. Fourteen cardiac surgeons (32%) said that, on average, they are interviewed less than once a year by daily newspapers.

Cardiac surgeons gave daily newspapers a much lower accuracy rating on a 1 (highly inaccurate) to 5 (highly accurate) scale than editors. The cardiac-surgeon response averaged 2.70, compared with the average editor response of 3.93 ($t = -5.41$, degrees of freedom = 42, $p = .000$). Only eight cardiac surgeons (17%) rated newspapers a 4 or 5, while 21 surgeons (46%) gave newspaper coverage a 3 rating. Seventeen cardiac surgeons (37%) felt that daily newspapers deserved a 1 or 2 accuracy rating. Cardiac surgeons accepted some of the blame for inaccurate medical stories. In particular, physician time constraints were cited as a key factor for inaccurate medical articles. Thirty cardiac surgeons (64%) said that coverage of medical issues would be more accurate if physicians were willing to spend more time with reporters, seven surgeons (15%) disagreed, and 10 surgeons (21%) were unsure.

Cardiac surgeons were divided over whether reporters who cover medicine should be required to take college courses in epidemiology, research design, biology, and chemistry. Nineteen cardiac surgeons (40%) felt that reporters should be required to take these courses, 17 surgeons (36%) felt that these courses were unnecessary, and 11 surgeons (23%) were unsure.

Cardiac surgeons strongly believed that newspapers should provide additional training or education for reporters who cover medicine. Thirty-seven cardiac surgeons (79%) backed additional training, four surgeons (9%) opposed it, and six surgeons (13%) were unsure.

In addition, cardiac surgeons believed that newspapers should make substantial investments into the education of reporters who cover medicine (Table 3). The cardiac-surgeon responses were statistically different from the editor responses ($t = 4.05$, degrees of freedom = 26, $p = .000$).

Cardiac surgeons also supported voluntary accreditation for reporters who cover medicine. Twenty-three cardiac surgeons (49%) backed voluntary accreditation, 15 surgeons (32%) opposed it, while nine surgeons (19%) were unsure.

In addition, cardiac surgeons overwhelmingly believed that they should be allowed to review articles for accuracy before publication. Table 4 compares the editor and cardiac-surgeon responses to this issue ($t = -11.93$, degrees of freedom = 44, $p = .000$).

Cardiac surgeons responded more often than editors, on average, that newspapers sensationalize medical stories ($t = -10.73$, degrees of freedom = 43, $p = .000$). Cardiac surgeons also asserted that daily newspapers are frequently biased toward negative medical stories ($t = -8.32$, degrees of freedom = 39, $p = .000$). Tables 5-6 compare the editor and physician responses about newspaper sensationalism and negative medical stories.

However, cardiac surgeons generally maintained that their relationships with reporters were cordial. Only five cardiac surgeons (12%) believed that interviews were adversarial most of the time, while 14 surgeons (33%) responded that interviews were adversarial some of the time. Seventeen surgeons (40%) said that interviews were rarely adversarial, and seven surgeons (16%) said that interviews were never adversarial.

In a different line of questioning, cardiac surgeons responded more often than editors that reporters who cover medicine are naive and easily misled ($t = -4.18$, degrees of freedom = 42, $p = .000$). Two cardiac surgeons (4%) believed that reporters who cover medicine are always naive and easily misled, while 11 surgeons (24%) asserted that reporters are misled most of the time. Thirty surgeons (65%) said that reporters are misled some of the time, while three surgeons (7%) said that reporters are rarely misled. Table 7 compares the responses of editors and cardiac surgeons.

DISCUSSION

The first research question asked whether large newspapers and small-medium newspapers would differ in their approaches to newspaper coverage of medicine. They did. Eighty-three percent of large newspapers publish at least six to 10 medical stories each week, compared with 36% of the small-medium newspapers (Chi square = 10.466, degrees of freedom = 4, p = .033). In addition, large daily newspapers were nearly four times as likely (57% vs. 15%) to use a medical-science reporter for medical stories (Chi square = 5.786, degrees of freedom = 1, p = .016).

It is likely that two factors contribute to the difference in medical coverage between small-medium and large newspapers. First, large daily newspapers have more editorial space to fill than small daily newspapers. Consequently, there is more of an opportunity for medical stories to be published. Second, medical-science reporters can produce a greater quantity of medical stories than general-assignment reporters who cover medicine along with several other beats. Larger newspapers seem to have greater resources for medical coverage than smaller newspapers, and it allows the larger papers to provide more extensive and probing coverage.

The second research question asked whether editors would believe medical stories were more accurate than cardiac surgeons. The majority of studies have found that medical professionals believe there is some inaccuracy in medical reporting (Anderson 1991; Gellert, Higgins, Lowery, and Maxwell 1994). The data were consistent with past research and showed editors did have more favorable views of coverage than cardiac surgeons. On a 1 (highly inaccurate) to 5 (highly accurate) scale, the average cardiac-surgeon response was 2.70, compared with the average editor response of 3.93 (t = -5.41, degrees of freedom = 42, p = .000).

There are several factors that could contribute to the perception differences between cardiac surgeons and editors about newspaper accuracy. Cardiac surgeons may be interviewed for more complex stories than other physicians, i.e., the benefits of coronary artery bypass grafting over percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty. It is likely that reporters make a greater number of factual errors as the material becomes more complex. In addition, the lead author's personal experience is that physicians seldom call editors to point out factual errors in medical stories. Thus, editors may not be aware of the factual errors contained in their newspaper stories.

Medical researchers note that physicians have criticized newspapers for inaccurate medical coverage throughout history. For example, William Osler, one of the pioneers of modern medicine, cautioned his colleagues against dallying with the "Delilah of the press" (Wilkes and Kravitz 1992; Osler 1905). Moreover, generations of medical school professors have passed on Dr. Osler's warning: "Believe nothing you see in the newspapers. They have done more to create dissatisfaction than all other agencies. If you see anything in them you know is true, begin to doubt it at once" (Osler 1905).

Nelkin (1996) and Allen (1995) propose another theory for the inaccuracies in medical stories: Many errors relate to reporters' efforts to present complex material in a readable way. Journalists refer to "the fat gene" rather than the "marker that may predispose an individual to obesity" (Nelkin 1996). In addition, Greenberg and Wartenberg (1990) show that inaccurate coverage about cancer and birth-related problems occurs from background information being omitted.

McCall and Stocking (1982) point out that scientists are also responsible for factual errors in daily newspapers. They cite a colleague who incorrectly reported the location of her first job and spelled a proper name two ways (McCall and Stocking 1982). "The problem," they say, "is that the interview essentially asks scientists to dictate, without notes, the first and final draft of a lecture to a lay audience. Few of us are sufficiently experienced at dictation to say precisely what we mean to our own satisfaction on the first try, even without trying also to tailor our message to a lay audience" (McCall and Stocking 1982).

Physician time constraints could be another cause of inaccurate medical coverage. Seventy percent of editors and 64% of cardiac surgeons agreed that coverage of medical stories would be more accurate if physicians were willing to spend more time with reporters. To address this issue, Hartman (1994) urges public-health officers to ask reporters about the focus of the interviews. Health officials can then prepare for the interview and direct their comments toward the reporter's interest (Hartman 1994). Greenberg and Wartenberg (1990) recommend that health practitioners come to interviews with two or three key points. These points should be covered several times.

The suggestions by Hartman (1994) and Greenberg and Wartenberg (1990) offer useful information to physicians about newspaper interviews. However, in the lead author's experience, physician time constraints are still one of the leading causes of inaccurate stories. This situation will only be remedied by longer interviews and greater interaction between physicians and reporters.

Would prepublication review of medical stories by physicians improve newspaper accuracy? Seventy-two percent of cardiac surgeons believed that physicians should always be allowed to review articles to improve their accuracy. In contrast, only 2% of editors believed that physicians should always be allowed to review articles to improve their accuracy. Other research also shows that prepublication review is the greatest single difference of opinion between scientists and journalists. Ryan (1979) finds that scientists strongly agree--while science writers strongly disagree--that it is a good idea for science writers to have their articles reviewed before publication by the scientists quoted in the stories. Eighty-six percent of journalists oppose prepublication review by scientists (Tankard and Ryan 1974).

Scientists argue that prepublication review improves the accuracy of newspaper stories. For example, Tankard and Ryan (1974) reveal that scientists identify half of the errors that occur in science articles. Journalists counter that tight deadlines prevent them from allowing scientists to review newspaper articles for accuracy (McCall and Stocking 1982). In addition, journalists question whether prepublication review compromises journalistic integrity and the reporter's need to remain independent of newsmakers (McCall and Stocking 1982). Finally, journalists assert that prepublication review could lead to censorship (McCall and Stocking 1982).

There are problems associated with prepublication review of medical stories. The lead author of this paper recalls covering a conference at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) about L-tryptophan associated eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome, a serious illness caused by contaminated vitamin supplements. Because of the story's implications as well as the complicated medical information, the NIH researcher was asked to review the material only for factual errors. Instead, the researcher insisted that the lead paragraph be changed to describe her role as the conference's chairwoman. The researcher also made three separate phone calls to debate style changes and grammar.

Despite this incident, reporters should understand that they are under no obligation to make the physician's changes. As a result, it seems that objections based on censorship are strained. In addition, arguments about tight deadlines are not persuasive. Reporters can send their articles to scientists by electronic mail. If the scientist reviews the article and sends corrections by deadline, the public is served by more accurate coverage. If not, there is no additional workload for the reporter, and the article is published. It is also worth noting that many major magazines employ "fact checkers" who confirm every factual statement and quote in articles (McCall and Stocking 1982). Authors are required to give references, copies of the scientific articles, and telephone numbers for the people who are quoted (McCall and Stocking 1982). It doesn't seem logical that magazine editors require this review, while newspaper editors argue that it compromises journalistic integrity.

Another way to improve the accuracy of medical stories in daily newspapers is through additional education for reporters. Sixty-four percent of editors say that newspapers should provide additional education or training to assist reporters who cover medicine. However, the data showed that only 19% of editors reported that their newspaper has provided additional education or training to their reporter who covers medicine. Only 16% of editors said that they would spend $500 to educate their reporter who covers medicine.

Gellert, Higgins, Maxwell, and Lowery (1994) assert that "media enterprises should have the vision to invest in having health reporters increase their understanding of health issues by routinely attending health conferences, completing courses on health issues designed for non-health professionals, and visiting health departments, research institutions, and service providers free of the pressure created by crisis reporting or a story submission deadline." Lebow and Arkin (1993) support collaborative seminars where scientists and journalists work to improve newspaper accuracy. In particular, seminars about epidemiology, the limitation of scientific methods, and data interpretation would be helpful to reporters (Lebow and Arkin 1993).

In a different line of questioning, cardiac surgeons and editors were asked about sensationalism in medical journalism. Tichenor, Olien, Harrison, and Donohue (1970) and Glynn and Tims (1982) define sensationalism as statements or phrases that meet at least one of the following criteria: "1. an obvious overstatement of fact; 2. placed emphasis on unique aspects of the situation; 3. introduced bias based on value judgments; 4. associated the subject of the story with an irrelevant issue; 5. treated the story in a frivolous manner." In our study, 72% of cardiac surgeons believed that daily newspapers always or mostly sensationalize medical stories, compared with 2% of editors.

Winsten (1985) agrees that sensationalism is common in medical stories. An overemphasis on the strong lead, he says, produces distorted coverage and "blatantly" misrepresents the facts. He cites a New England Journal of Medicine editorial that says a radioimmunoassay for ovarian cancer "is not as useful as we might wish." However, the story by United Press International said: "A new, simple blood test developed to measure tumor growth promises to aid greatly in treatment of ovarian cancer. . . ." In addition, there was no mention of the assay's limitations in the first 300 words of the story. United Press International, he says, exploited the hopes of cancer patients to attract more readers (Winsten 1985).

In a study of newspaper stories about cancer and birth-related problems, Greenberg and Wartenberg (1990) identify a preponderance of risk-asserting phrases near the beginning of the stories. Freimuth, Greenberg, DeWitt, and Romano (1984) add that news reporters place too much emphasis on "miracle drugs" and "major breakthroughs."

Lawrence K. Altman (1993), a prominent medical journalist with The New York Times and a physician, counters that some allegations of sensationalism are actually aggressive, investigational journalism. For example, in 1989, doctors in New Mexico discovered the relationship between the dietary supplement, L-tryptophan, and eosinophilia myalgia syndrome. A reporter learned of the situation and asked the state health department for more information. Health officials responded that a news story would be irresponsible and unethical.

"But the reporter rejected the warning," Altman relates. "She reported the cases immediately. The news allowed many primary-care doctors to learn much more precisely--and in timely fashion--about the condition that they were dealing with, a fact that in turn led to the savings of thousands of dollars of unnecessary tests by clinicians and public health researchers" (Altman 1993). In addition, the story helped physicians to identify a nationwide outbreak of the syndrome and spurred a national recall of L-tryptophan. Health officials later acknowledged that the story aided the investigation. The reporter, Tamar Stieber, won the Pulitzer Prize (Altman 1993).

Based on the survey responses, it seems that editors and cardiac surgeons have dramatically different definitions of sensationalism. As a result, it is unlikely that these differences will be resolved in the near future. Perhaps collaborative efforts between reporters and physicians could result in a better definition of sensationalism and ways to avoid it. However, physicians need to understand that media outlets serve an entertainment function and will emphasize the unique aspects of a story. In contrast, reporters need to understand that it is unethical to mislead the public with exaggerated medical stories.

Interestingly, cardiac surgeons and editors agreed that newspaper interviews are usually cordial. Fifty-six percent of cardiac surgeons and 63% of editors reported that their relationships with physicians were rarely or never adversarial. Our results parallel a 1994 study by Gellert, Higgins, Lowery, and Maxwell that found 66% of state and 70% of local health officers report that their relationships with reporters are never or infrequently adversarial.

There are several explanations for why editors and cardiac surgeons assert that newspaper relations are generally positive. Daily newspapers educate millions of Americans about medicine. Physicians may realize the importance of daily newspapers in communicating medical information. For example, daily newspapers can play crucial roles in public-health emergencies, such as the outbreak of L-tryptophan associated eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome (Altman 1993).

However, many cardiac surgeons give reporters little or no respect. When asked are newspaper reporters who cover medicine naive and easily misled, 4% of cardiac surgeons said always, 24% said most of the time, and 65% said some of the time. Anther study reports a similar finding. Tichenor, Olien, Harrison, and Donohue (1970) agree that scientists have a condescending attitude toward reporters, possibly because they perceive a large status gap between themselves and reporters.

What can be done to address this issue? McCall (1988) urges both scientists and journalists to improve their attitudes toward each other. In particular, he encourages scientists to treat competent reporters with respect. Lebow and Arkin (1993) maintain that scientists need to be more cooperative with newspaper reporters.

CONCLUSION

The first step in performing this study about newspaper coverage of medicine was to select the sample populations. It was believed that the senior editor of a daily newspaper was in a unique position to participate for three reasons: The senior editor decides the newspaper's editorial focus, the senior editor helps to decide which stories run, and the senior editor has extensive work experience in a variety of newspaper positions.

It was more difficult to choose the physician population. With the exception of medical researchers, most physicians have little or no contact with daily newspapers. Moreover, the physician population needed to come from a wide geographic location with exposure to small, medium, and large daily newspapers.

The cardiac surgeons listed in a statewide consumer report about the quality of open-heart surgery were chosen for the physician population. This report receives widespread coverage in daily newspapers. As a result, the physician group had a high newspaper exposure, and the surgeons were familiar with the majority of Pennsylvania newspapers.

There are some limitations to this approach. First, the data only apply to Pennsylvania and may not be comparable to other areas of the United States. Second, the 31% response rate of cardiac surgeons may limit the conclusions that can be drawn about their views of newspaper coverage of medicine. Third, cardiac surgeons' views may not be representative of all physicians.

However, this project may provide some useful information about medical coverage in newspapers. The data showed that large newspapers and small-medium newspapers differ in their approaches to medical news stories. In particular, large newspapers provided a greater quantity of medical coverage than small newspapers.

Eighty-three percent of large newspapers publish at least six to 10 medical stories each week, compared with 36% of the small-medium newspapers (Chi square = 10.466, degrees of freedom = 4, p = .033). Furthermore, large daily newspapers were nearly four times as likely (57% vs. 15%) to use medical-science reporters for medical stories (Chi square = 5.786, degrees of freedom = 1, p = .016). The data also revealed that editors believe that medical stories are more accurate than cardiac surgeons.

We conclude: 1. large newspapers and small-medium newspapers differ in their approaches to newspaper coverage of medicine; 2. editors perceive that medical stories are more accurate than cardiac surgeons.

Future research should concentrate on the causes of the perception differences between newspaper editors and physicians. In addition, because prepublication review is such a contentious issue, a prospective study that analyzes the effect of prepublication review on accuracy, physician-reporter relationships, censorship issues, and deadline time constraints would be valuable.

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Table 1. How many medical stories does your newspaper print each week?

*Newspapers with circulations <50,000 (n=33)**

Number of stories	Respondents (%)
0	0 (0%)
1	3 (10%)
2-5	16 (52%)
6-10	7 (23%)
11-15	5 (16%)
>15	0 (0%)

Newspapers with circulations ≥50,000 (n=12)

Number of stories	Respondents (%)
0	0 (0%)
1	0 (0%)
2-5	2 (17%)
6-10	4 (33%)
11-15	4 (33%)
>15	2 (17%)

Chi square = 10.466, degrees of freedom = 4, p = .033

* Two of the 33 editors did not answer this question.

Table 2. Who usually covers medical stories?

*Newspapers with circulations <50,000 (n=33)**

Type of Reporter	Respondents (%)
Medical-science	5 (15%)
General-assignment	26 (76%)
Business	1 (3%)
Features	2 (6%)

*Newspapers with circulations ≥50,000 (n=12)***

Type of Reporter	Respondents (%)*
Medical-science	8 (57%)
General-assignment	4 (29%)
Business	1 (7%)
Features	1 (7%)

* One respondent gave two answers.

** Two respondents gave two answers.

Chi square = 5.786, degrees of freedom = 1, p = .016

Table 3. How much should newspapers spend to educate their reporter who covers medicine?

Range	Number of editors (%)
$0	17 (45%)
$1 to $249	12 (32%)
$250 to $499	3 (8%)
$500 to $749	2 (5%)
$750 to $999	1 (3%)
$1,000 ≥	3 (8%)

Range	Number of physicians (%)
$0	6 (19%)
$1 to $249	1 (3%)
$250 to $499	2 (6%)
$500 to $749	4 (13%)
$750 to $999	3 (9%)
$1,000 ≥	16 (50%)

Student's t test = 4.05, degrees of freedom = 26, p = .000.

Table 4. Do you feel physicians should be allowed to review articles for accuracy before they go to press?

Editor responses	Number (%)
Always	1 (2%)
Most of the time	3 (7%)
Some of the time	12 (27%)
Rarely	11 (25%)
Never	17 (39%)

Physician responses	Number
Always	34 (72%)
Most of the time	8 (17%)
Some of the time	3 (6%)
Rarely	1 (2%)
Never	1 (2%)

Student's t test = -11.93, degrees of freedom = 44, p = .000

Table 5. Do newspapers sensationalize medical stories?

Editor responses	Number
Always	0 (0%)
Most of the time	1 (2%)
Some of the time	24 (56%)
Rarely	15 (35%)
Never	3 (7%)

Physician responses	Number
Always	12 (26%)
Most of the time	22 (47%)
Some of the time	13 (28%)
Rarely	0 (0%)
Never	0 (0%)

Student's t test = -10.73, degrees of freedom = 43, p = .000

Table 6. Are daily newspapers biased toward negative medical stories?

Editor responses	Number
Always	0 (0%)
Most of the time	0 (0%)
Some of the time	12 (29%)
Rarely	18 (44%)
Never	11 (27%)

Physician responses	Number
Always	4 (9%)
Most of the time	11 (24%)
Some of the time	30 (67%)
Rarely	0 (0%)
Never	0 (0%)

Student's t test = -8.32, degrees of freedom = 39, p = .000

Table 7. Are newspaper reporters who cover medicine naive and easily misled?

Editor responses	Number (%)
Always	0 (0%)
Most of the time	1 (2%)
Some of the time	27 (63%)
Rarely	14 (33%)
Never	1 (2%)

Physician responses	Number
Always	2 (4%)
Most of the time	11 (24%)
Some of the time	30 (65%)
Rarely	3 (7%)
Never	0 (0%)

Student's t test = -4.18, degrees of freedom = 42, p = .000

ENDNOTE

1. There are several statistical approaches that could be used to compare the groups. For an attempted census, it is usually best to set a decision rule about acceptable differences in percentages and get comparative results. However, the consultant statistician on the project suggested that chi square analyses and Student's t tests be run because of the response rate in the physician group.

Newspaper Division

Effect of Structural Pluralism and Corporate News Structure
On News Source Perceptions of Critical Content

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Abstract

Effect of Structural Pluralism and Corporate News Structure On News Source Perceptions of Critical Content

A recent content analysis of newspaper editorials and letters to the editor disputes the conventional wisdom that newspapers become less vigorous editorially as they acquire the characteristics of the corporate form of organization. However, many scholars remain skeptical. This study tested the editorial vigor hypothesis using an alternative methodology — a national probability survey of mainstream news sources (mayors and police chiefs). The data provide partial support for the corporate structure theory — the more structurally complex the newspaper, the more news sources perceived that paper as being critical of them and their institutions. Drawing on previous research and these findings, the author argues that corporate newspapers are more critical because they are more likely to be located in pluralistic communities, which contain more social conflict and criticism of dominant groups and value systems, and because they are more insulated from local political pressures. From a broader perspective, the results may be interpreted as supporting theories which hold that the pace of social change quickens as social systems become more structurally pluralistic.

Effect of Structural Pluralism and Corporate News Structure On News Source Perceptions of Critical Content

The notion that messages in mainstream news media generally support the goals of established elites and dominant value systems, often to the detriment of challenging groups, is one of the most strongly supported propositions in the literature on media effects.[1] However, the question of whether such support increases or decreases with changes in the structure of social systems and news organizations themselves has yet to be resolved. Many researchers, especially neo-Marxist theorists, believe the growth of large-scale corporate media organizations is producing a less vigorous press — i.e., one that is less likely to criticize established authorities and ideas.[2] Critics argue that corporate media are less vigorous in pursuing the news and in criticizing dominant political institutions because they are more concerned about profits than product quality or information diversity.[3]

Although some research suggests that newspapers are more profitable as they grow and become more structurally complex,[4] several recent empirical studies have challenged the notion that corporate newspapers place more emphasis on profits as an organizational goal and less on product quality.[5] A comprehensive review of the empirical literature also concluded that chain newspapers are, on balance, more vigorous editorially than independently owned newspapers.[6] And recent research has found that as newspapers become more "corporatized" they actually publish a higher proportion and number of editorials and letters to the editor that are critical of mainstream groups and ideas.[7] One implication of these findings is that corporate newspapers may have a greater, not lesser, capacity to promote social change, even if they, like all mainstream media, provide broad-based support for established authorities and dominant value systems.

Nevertheless, many scholars and professionals remain skeptical of the notion that news organizations could be more critical of the status quo as they become more "corporatized." They question whether surveys of journalists' opinions or content analyses of editorial content are themselves sufficient to test the editorial-vigor hypothesis.[8] And there are, indeed, shortcomings to those methods. Neither of them can show whether the alleged criticism is having an effect on those who make the public policy decisions or the actual decision-making process itself. In other words, even if the content of newspapers becomes more critical of the status quo as the newspapers become more corporatized, who cares if political elites do not perceive this criticism or if it has no effect on public policy?

Measuring the impact of news content on public policy decisions themselves is an extremely difficult task — one well beyond the scope of this project. However, there is another approach for testing the editorial vigor hypothesis and resolving the former problem — ask news sources themselves whether they believe news and editorial page coverage is more (or less) critical of them and their policies. Although elite awareness is not a necessary condition for changes in public policy, a theory that excludes human agency may be faulted for reifying social structure or for being too reductionistic.[9] The assumption here is that social change often, but not always, takes place when elite decision-makers are faced with crises or criticism, and theoretical imagery that describes the linkage between media content and public policy outcomes is crucial for explaining social change.

Although many researchers have conducted studies of news source evaluations of news content, this author was unable to locate any studies that have sought to link those evaluations to changes in the structure of a community and news organizations.[10] The purpose of this paper is to begin filling this void. If the content of corporate newspapers is more critical of the status quo, as previous research suggests, then a reasonable deduction is that this criticism will manifest itself in the perceptions of the established or mainstream news sources that are being criticized. More specifically, this study will attempt to answer the following two questions: (1) Do mainstream news sources in communities served by newspapers that score high on measures of corporate structure perceive their newspapers as being more or less critical of them and their policies than sources in communities served by newspapers that score low? (2) Does corporate structure mediate the effects of community structure (or structural pluralism) on news source perceptions of how critical their newspaper is of them and their policies? It is important to point out that this study does not measure social change directly. However, the overarching theoretical framework holds that perceptions of increased criticisms are a sufficient condition for initiating public policy actions that lead to social change under certain conditions.

As in past studies, a Weberian model is used to define a corporate newspaper — which is an organization that has (1) a clear-cut division of labor, (2) a hierarchy of authority, (3) lots of rules and regulations, (4) formalistic impersonality, (5) employment based on technical qualifications, (6) rationality, or a high degree of efficiency in decision-making, and (7) a complex ownership structure (e.g., chain ownership, public corporation, public ownership).[11] For heuristic purposes, the corporate newspaper may be contrasted with the entrepreneurial newspaper — an ideal type[12] that is structurally simple and is owned and managed by the same individual or family. Empirically, though, corporate newspaper structure is operationalized as a continuous variable derived from 12 individual indicators.

Previous Research

Although no studies could be located that have specifically examined the relationship between organizational structure and source perceptions of critical content, a number of studies have looked at the impact of organizational and community structure on editorial-page content and journalists' news values. In general, these studies support a theory which holds that newspapers located in more pluralistic communities (e.g., corporate newspapers) are more critical of the status quo.[13] More specifically, three generalizations may be culled from the literature:

(1) *Newspapers located in large, pluralistic communities contain more social conflict and criticism of dominant groups and value systems than newspapers in small, homogenous communities.*[14] A well-documented research finding is that newspapers in homogenous communities contain less conflict news and criticism of established institutions and elites.[15] The amount of social conflict and criticism is low partly because the community contains a limited number of alternative or challenging groups and organizations.[16] In contrast, social conflict is a much more common feature of large, pluralistic communities.[17] The conflict is greater in pluralistic communities in part because they contain a greater number and variety of special interest groups competing for limited social, political and economic resources.[18] Decision-making in such communities is expected to take into account diverse perspectives and views. And although stories and editorials that contain conflict or criticism are often viewed as threatening to the social order, such stories often play a significant role in contributing to system stability because they introduce alternative ideas or innovations that enable organizations and institutions to adapt to changing conditions.[19]

(2) *Editorial-page content in newspapers that exhibit the characteristics of the corporate form of organization is more critical of mainstream sources.* As noted earlier, a comprehensive review of the literature on chain ownership found that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the weight of the evidence shows that chain newspapers are more vigorous editorially than independently owned newspapers.[20] Of the 18 studies examined, three generally support the critical model,[21] seven show no relationship or have mixed findings,[22] and eight suggest

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that chain organizations are more vigorous or create conditions conducive to greater diversity.[23] Theoretically, one of the reasons chain newspapers are more critical may stem from the fact that their publishers and journalists have fewer ties to the local power structure,[24] which in turn helps insulate the newspaper from local elites and parochial political pressures.[25] This author also argues, and research data show, that professional managers, including editors, wield more power in corporate organizations, which helps to promote a greater emphasis on professionalism often at the expense of serving the interests and needs of local elites.[26]

These hypotheses also are supported by a recent national probability content analysis of daily newspapers.[27] Analyzing the editorial pages of two issues for nearly 200 newspapers, this author found that the more a newspaper exhibits the characteristics of the corporate form of organization, the greater the number and proportion of editorials and letters to the editor that are critical of mainstream organizations. The correlations were moderately strong, ranging from .20 to .52. The findings from this study may be positioned with a larger theory of social change which views corporate media as helping to promote many of the social changes that have occurred during the 20th century.[28] More specifically:

> As social systems become more pluralistic, news media within those systems become more critical of traditional ways and established institutions. Media reflect to some degree the diversity of the communities they serve, and increasing role specialization and professionalization, by-products of community and organizational growth, insulate journalists from political pressures. The increased level of criticism that emerges from these structural forces contributes to a public opinion discourse that places increased pressure on existing institutions to change.[29]

A study by Akhavan-Majid, Rife and Gopinath also supports the argument that chain newspapers are more critical of the status quo. They found that Gannett newspapers were far more likely than a sample of non-Gannett newspapers to oppose positions taken by the White House and the Supreme Court on three major issues.[30]

(3) *Journalists from corporate newspapers are more likely to emphasize an active, interpretive, investigative and critical role for the news media.* Gladney reported that editors at large circulation newspapers — which is a good proxy measure of corporate structure[31] — were more likely than those at small newspapers to rate "editorial courage"and "editorial independence" as primary indicators of newspaper excellence.[32] Lacy and Bernstein found that larger newspapers devote a greater percentage of their editorial and op-ed space to city issues than did smaller newspapers.[33] In another study, Lacy reported that group-owned newspapers allocate more space to editorials and op-ed material than their independent counterparts.[34] And Akhavan-Majid and Boudreau concluded that editors of chain-owned newspapers are more likely than their independent counterparts to emphasize an active, interpretive, investigative and critical role for the press, and support for these values increased as the size of the chain increased.[35]

Theoretical Perspective

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, this author expects that newspapers become more critical of mainstream news sources and ideas as they acquire the characteristics of the corporate form of organization. Aside from the empirical research reported above, this hypothesis is grounded in a broader macrosocial theory of organization which holds that the pace of social change quickens as an organization and the community in which it resides become more structurally pluralistic.[36] As noted in the introduction, this model assumes that corporate newspapers, like all mainstream media, are social institutions that play an important role in maintaining a social system (whether for good or bad reasons).

In other words, mass media are highly responsive to political and economic centers of power and promote values generally consistent with capitalist ideals and elite interests.[37]

Nevertheless, the fact that mainstream news organizations generally support the status quo does not mean those organizations are simply lapdogs of the rich and powerful.[38] News media often criticize those in power, through news stories that cover social conflict as well as through institutionalized editorials, columns and letters to the editor. The criticism generated in mainstream media is viewed by some scholars as producing little or no meaningful social change. From an absolute standpoint, such critics may be right. However, in relative terms, this author argues that the historical transition from the entrepreneurial to the corporate form of organization[39] under most conditions has produced and will continue to produce a more, not less, vigorous press, for two reasons mentioned earlier. The first is that corporate newspapers themselves are more likely to be located in communities that contain more social conflict and criticism of dominant groups and values systems. The second reason is that corporate newspaper publishers and editorial staffs are more insulated from special interests and political pressures. They have weaker ties to the local community, which enhances the ability of newspaper to criticize the local power structure, because owners and top managers of corporate newspapers are less likely to grow up on the community their newspaper services, they work at the newspaper for a shorter period of time, and they are oriented more to the larger corporation than to the local community.[40]

In contrast to the conventional wisdom, the key strength of the macrosocial model presented here is that it helps to account for social change and the role that mass media often play in promoting such change. As social systems become more pluralistic, news media would be expected to become more critical of traditional ways and established institutions. Media reflect to some degree the diversity of the communities they serve, and increasing role specialization and professionalization, by-products of community growth, help to insulate journalists even more from outside pressures. To be sure, the mass media are agents of social control, and social change does not come quickly. Elites resist giving up power and resources. Cultural values are also very difficult to change.[41] However, the criticism that corporate newspapers cannot publish news that changes the distribution of power in a social system does not fit well with a long-term view of history. Many structural changes have occurred *within* the system during the 20th century (e.g., affirmative action standards, anti-discrimination laws, voting rights for women), and media have played an important role in promoting and, later, legitimizing such changes.[42]

A key assumption underlying this theory is that the increased level of criticism that allegedly emerges from these structural forces contributes to discourse that places increasing pressure on existing institutions to change. This is a proposition that needs additional empirical verification;[43] however, research on that proposition would be moot if corporate media are not more critical of the status quo. And that is one of goals of this study — to establish the linkage. Another assumption of the model being tested here is that source perceptions are relatively good indicator of reality. While perceptions do not always mirror reality and sources may often ignore the editorial criticism, a theory of social change that does not posit that social actors (e.g., news sources, public policy makers) have at least some ability to perceive the criticism reduces social action completely to structural forces. The model being proposed here does not posit that source perceptions are necessary for social change, only that they are a sufficient condition.

In sum, it is hypothesized that **1)** *the greater the structural pluralism, the more a newspaper will exhibit the characteristics of the corporate form of*

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organization; **2)** *the greater the structural pluralism, the greater the likelihood that mainstream news sources will perceive that newspaper as being critical of them, their policies and their institutions*; and **3)** *the more a newspaper exhibits the characteristics of the corporate form of organization, the greater the likelihood mainstream news sources will perceive that newspaper as being critical of them, their policies and their institutions.*

Method and Measures

The data for this study are drawn from two national probability mail surveys and 1990 census data. The key independent variable, corporate newspaper structure, is taken from a 1993 mail survey of the highest ranking manager (usually the publisher), the top editor and a police reporter at 250 daily newspapers randomly selected from *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*. The mailings to the top managers and editors were personally addressed, whereas the mailing to the reporters was simply addressed "police reporter" because no list of such names could be found. These three groups were surveyed because they represent a good cross-section of social roles within a newspaper. Of the 750 questionnaires mailed, responses were obtained from 409 journalists at 223 newspapers, for a total response rate of 55 percent. .There were no significant differences in response rates for the three groups (top manager, 52%; top editor, 56%, and police reporter, 55%).[44] There also was no significant correlation between the type of respondent (top manager, top editor, reporter) and newspaper circulation (r=.01).[45]

In 1995, a separate questionnaire was mailed to mayors and police chiefs in the 223 cities who responded to the first mailing (total number mailed = 446). Mayors and police chiefs were selected because they (1) are frequently in the news, (2) generally represent mainstream interests and power groups, and (3) are found in nearly every city. A follow-up mailing that included a 25-cent incentive also was conducted to boost response rates. A total of 341 public officials, or 76 percent, responded. They represented 206 of the 223 communities served by the newspapers.

Although individuals responded to the questionnaires, it is important to point out that the community — not the individual — is the unit of analysis. To conduct such an analysis, the findings were aggregated when more than respondent at a newspaper or in the community responded to the survey. For continuous measures (i.e., ordinal, interval and ratio level measures) and dichotomous nominal measures,[46] the final value used in the analysis represented the mean of the ratings given. For example, if a police chief and mayor in the same city gave a value of "5" and "3," respectively, to a particular measure, the actual value used in the analysis was "4." In cases where the values for one of the respondents was missing (e.g., failure to answer a question), the values of the other respondent(s) were substituted. No nominal variables containing more than three values were included in this analysis.

Weber's conceptual framework was used as a guide to create indicators of corporate structure.[47] Respondents in the 1993 survey were asked to provide information on 14 individual measures. The first set of measures was designed to measure the division of labor, or organizational complexity. The most frequently used measure here is the number of workers or employees.[48] Three measures were employed:[49] number of full-time employees (mean=205); number of full-time reporters and editors (mean=40);[50] and number of beats or departments (mean=5.3).[51] Hierarchy of authority was operationalized as the number of promotions needed for a reporter to become top editor (mean=3.1).[52] Three indicators of the presence of rules and procedures were used: whether the newspaper has "its own formal, written code of ethics" (33%); whether the newspaper has "its own employee handbook of rules and procedures" (66%); and whether the newspaper has its own "style book (in addition to AP or UPI)" (51%). Staff expertise was measured by a question which asked whether "reporters normally need a bachelor's degree to be considered for employment at your newspaper" (73%). Rationality was operationalized as the amount of importance top management places on "finding the most efficient way to solve problems" (mean=4.78 on 7-point scale).[53] Five measures of ownership structure were included: whether the newspaper was owned by chain or group (67%);[54] whether public ownership was possible (31%);[55] whether their newspaper was a legally incorporated business (81%);[56] whether the newspaper was *not* controlled by one family or individual (28%);[57] and the number of daily newspapers in chain (mean=25).[58]

The 14 items were factor-analyzed using principal components, oblique rotation.[59] Oblique rotation was used because it was expected that corporate structure is a multidimensional concept whose dimensions are not orthogonal.[60] Using an eigenvalue of 1.00 as a minimum for defining a factor, the analysis initially produced a four-factor solution. However, this solution produced multiple factor loadings for several variables. A five-factor solution was then extracted, and this stabilized most of the loadings. The results are presented in Table 1. As expected, the division of labor items loaded heavily together, on the first factor, but the hierarchy of authority measure also loaded strongly there. Conceptually one may be able to distinguish between division of labor and hierarchy of authority, but operationally they could not be separated in this study.

Insert Table 1 about here

For purposes here, the first factor was defined as "structural complexity." Newspapers that score higher are more complex. The ownership items loaded heavily on the second factor, with one exception — number of newspapers in chain — which also loaded moderately high on the third and fourth factors (rules and regulations and staff expertise, respectively). Because of these mixed loadings, this item was excluded from the ownership index. The third factor included two of the three rules and regulations measures: whether the newspaper has an employee handbook of rules and a formal, written code of ethics. The other measure, whether the newspaper has its own style book, loaded most highly on the fourth factor (staff expertise) and posted the lowest final communality estimate (i.e., had the lowest explained variance). As such, it also was excluded from subsequent analysis. The fifth factor consisted solely of the rationality measure.

In sum, the factor analysis produced five empirically distinct factors composed of 12 of the 14 original measures, which altogether explained 71 percent of the total variance in those variables. An overall corporate index variable was created after the values for the individual measures were standardized and summed (missing values reduced the total sample size for the index measure to 199). The final index closely resembled a normal curve, with a mean of "0" and a standard deviation of "1." The minimum value was -2.56 and the maximum value 2.80. Only seven cases fell outside two standard deviations.

Zero-order correlations among the five factors or dimensions are shown in Table 2. Structural complexity is correlated with every dimension except ownership structure. In fact, none of the four individual ownership indicators is even moderately correlated with the structural complexity index (data not shown). These findings are consistent with recent research, which has found little or no correlation between circulation (a proxy measure for complexity) and chain ownership in cross-sectional studies.[61] Historically, though, this has not always been the case. Previous research has shown that chain ownership and circulation have been moderately correlated; that is, larger papers are more likely than smaller ones to be part of a chain.[62] However, chain ownership has become so diffused in the newspaper industry (about 80 percent are now owned by chains) that it no longer appears to be a sensitive measure of corporate complexity in cross-sectional studies.[63] This analysis will retain the ownership index, however, because it is still correlated with the rules and procedures and the rationality dimensions.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 also shows that the dimension exhibiting the strongest intercorrelations is rules and procedures. All of the correlations between it and the other indices are greater than .20. "Rules" also has the strongest individual correlation with the overall corporate structure index (r=.68). This finding supports Mansfield's argument that rules may be at the heart of the bureaucratic structure — it is the one element in this data that links all of the other dimensions together.[64] Rationality is correlated with all of the dimensions except hiring college graduates for reporting positions, which in turn is correlated with structural complexity and rules but not ownership. Overall, then, ownership structure and hiring college graduates are the two weakest indicators of corporate structure.

The dependent variable was conceptually defined as news sources' perceptions of how critical the local daily was of their policies, decisions or city hall in general. The operational measure consisted of a 10-item index (exact wording, means and standard deviations presented in Table 3), which had a high degree of internal reliability (Alpha = .88). The responses for each item were recorded on five-point scales, and for conceptual clarity the final index was divided by 10 to convert it back into five-point scale.

Insert Table 3 about here

The exogenous independent variable — structural pluralism — was conceptually defined as the number of groups in a community or social system.[65] Most studies measure this by counting the number of businesses, churches, schools, and people and/or recording the level of education, income, and occupational complexity.[66] The latter three measures are particularly effective at measuring structural pluralism that is a function of the division of labor. In this study, structural pluralism was an index composed of six individual measures taken from the 1990 U.S. census of counties and cities.[67] Five of those indicators are county-based measures. Emphasis was placed on the county rather than the city because the market area (community) for most daily newspapers is larger than the city limits in which the newspaper is located. The six measures (see Table 3) are (1) city population, (2) county population, (3) percent of population with a bachelor's degree or higher, (4) per capita income, (5) percent of population employed in professional, managerial and technical positions, and (6) number of nonfarm business establishments. Standardized alpha for the six-item index was .82.

One major control variable was also included in the analysis: Whether public officials considered themselves to a personal friend of the publisher.[68] This variable was controlled to rule out personal relationships as the possible source of the effects from organizational structure. However, it was also hypothesized that the probability of a news source being a personal friend of the publisher will diminish as the newspaper becomes more corporatized (or structurally complex) and as the community becomes more pluralistic. In short, as organizational size and complexity increase, the structural probability of developing close relationships decreases.

Findings

The data provide partial support for the first hypothesis, which expected that the corporate newspaper index would correlate with the structural pluralism index. Table 2 shows that the zero-order correlation between the two indices is .28 ($p<.01$). However, only two of the five individual dimensions of corporate structure are significantly related to structural pluralism. The rules and procedures measure is weakly related ($r=.11$; $p<.05$). The structural complexity measure is much more strongly correlated ($r=.52$; $p<.01$). This finding is not surprising, since both structural pluralism and structural complexity are primarily measures of organizational complexity.[69] But the finding that the other dimensions are statistically unrelated to structural pluralism means they cannot mediate the effects of structural pluralism on perceptions of critical content (an issue to be examined subsequently).

The data provide weak support, at best, for the second hypothesis, which expected that structural pluralism would have direct effects on perceptions of critical content. Table 4 shows that the zero-order correlation between the two indices is .15 ($p<.01$), very weak. The structural pluralism is not significantly related to three of the 10 perceived critical measures and only weakly related to the seven others. The strongest correlation is only .16 (the "Is not fair" measure). Furthermore, regression analysis shows that the bivariate relationship between structural pluralism ($r=.15$; $p<.01$) becomes non-significant when controlling for structural complexity, one dimension of the corporate index (see Table 5, model #2). In other words, structural complexity alone mediates all of the effects of structural pluralism on perceived critical content.

Insert Table 4 about here

The data support third hypothesis, which expected that public officials in cities served by newspapers that exhibit the characteristics of the corporate form of organization would perceive their newspaper as being more critical of them and their institutions. This generalization applies to the overall corporate index as well as to the structural complexity dimension. These relationships also hold up when controlling for structural pluralism.

Table 4 shows that the zero-order correlation between perceptions and the corporate newspaper index is .30 (p<.01). Mayors and police chiefs in cities served by corporate newspapers perceive those newspapers as being more critical of them and their policies. The corporate index is significantly related to all 10 indicators of critical content. Four of the five corporate dimensions are also significantly related to the critical content index. The only exception is the rationality dimension (r=.04; p>.05). Nevertheless, only the structural complexity dimension is significantly related to every individual critical content indicator, and in most cases the correlations are stronger than those for the overall corporate index. Regression analysis also suggests that structural complexity takes up the lion's share of variance. When the critical content index is regressed onto the five corporate dimensions, only structural complexity is significantly related to the critical content index. The partial correlation coefficients were as follows: structural complexity, .29 (p<.001); hiring college grads, .10 (n.s.); ownership structure, .10 (n.s.); rationality, .04 (n.s.); and rules, .01 (n.s.). R-square was .13. Structural complexity alone accounts for 9 percent of the variance.

Additional analysis was conducted to determine whether the corporate indices would still remain predictors of perceptions when controlling for structural pluralism as well as for whether the news sources are personal friends with the publisher. The results, which are shown in Table 5 and Figure 1, suggest that (1) structural pluralism does not have direct effects on perceptions, (2) structural complexity mediates all of the effects of structural pluralism on perceptions, and (3) friendship is directly related to perceptions and also mediates some of the effects of the corporate index.

Insert Table 5 about here

To begin with, Model #1 in Table 5 shows that the corporate newspaper index remains significantly related to the perceived critical content index when controlling for structural pluralism. Structural pluralism is also significantly related to perceptions. However, Model #2 shows that the relationship between structural pluralism and perceptions dwindles to nearly zero when controlling for structural complexity (one dimension of the corporate index). Both models explain about 10 percent of the total variance. The amount of explained variance jumps significantly to 18 percent and 16 percent, respectively, when friendship is introduced in Models #3 and #4. Sources who are personal friends with publishers are much less likely to say the content of the local newspaper is critical of them or city hall. Structural pluralism is significantly related to perceptions when controlling for the corporate index (Model #3), but the relationship washes out again when controlling for structural pluralism (Model #4).

Path analysis in Figure 1 summarizes the analysis. The two models differ only in terms of the corporate structure variable — Model #1 contains the corporate index variable and Model #2 contains the structural complexity variable. In Path Model #1, structural pluralism has direct and indirect effects on perceptions of critical content even after controlling for the corporate index and whether the publisher is a personal friend. After summing the direct and indirect effects for all of the variables (indirect effects are determined by simply multiplying the coefficients for statistically significant paths), each of the three independent variables explains about a third of the variance in perceptions. However, in Path Model #2, the effects of structural pluralism are entirely mediated by structural complexity. The total variance explained in the two models (18% versus 16%) is not statistically significant. Model #2 would, therefore, seem to be a better fit because it is more parsimonious (the other four dimensions of the corporate index are superfluous). However, in either case, a key finding is that the greater the structural complexity of a newspaper, the more mayors and police chiefs perceive that newspaper as being critical of them and their institutions.[70]

Insert Figure 1 about here

Summary and Discussion

The conventional wisdom is not kind to corporate newspapers. Many scholars and professionals believe corporate news media are destroying good journalism and democratic principles. According to the critics, the more a news organization exhibits the characteristics of the corporate form of organization, the more it maximizes profits, usually at the expense of editorial vigor.

Ironically, though, there is not a great deal of empirical evidence to support the critical model. For example, research shows that even though corporate newspapers appear to be more profitable they actually place less emphasis on profits and more on product quality as organizational goals. A comprehensive literature review also shows that chain newspapers, on balance, are more vigorous editorially than independents. And a content analysis of daily newspapers shows that as newspapers becomes more "corporatized," they publish a larger number and proportion of editorials and letters to the editor that contain criticism of mainstream groups and ideas. However, many scholars remain skeptical. The purpose of this study was to test the editorial vigor hypothesis using another an alternative methodology — one in which mainstream news sources judge their local paper.

More specifically, it was hypothesized that the more pluralistic the community and the more corporatized the newspaper, the more mayors and police chiefs would perceive that newspaper as being more critical of them and their policies. Corporate newspapers were expected to be more critical because, it was argued, they are more likely to be located in pluralistic communities, which contain more social conflict and criticism of dominant groups and value systems, and because their managers and journalists are more insulated from local political pressures. On the latter point, research shows that owners and managers of corporate newspapers have weaker ties to the communities in which they work. They are less likely to have grown up there and they are oriented more to the corporation than to the community. In addition, corporate newspapers would be expected to be more insulated because research shows that journalists at those organizations play a greater role in controlling news content and owners play less.

Using national probability surveys of newspapers and mainstream news sources in about 200 communities, this study provided more evidence to support the proposition that some aspects of corporate structure contributes to a more vigorous press. Specifically, the more structurally complex the newspaper, the more critical mayors and police chiefs perceived their newspapers to be. Other aspects of corporate structure — including ownership, rules, rationality and staff expertise — have little or no effect on perceptions. Consistent with previous research,[71] these findings suggest that organizational complexity is the most important factor in predicting organizational outcomes. This study also found that, when controlling for structural complexity of the newspaper, structural pluralism (in the community) has no direct effect on perceptions — those effects are mediated by structural complexity.

As with all studies, caution should be used in interpreting these findings. The perceptions of these news sources may not mirror reality. This study also did not directly measure whether the perceived criticism has an impact on public policy making — this is one of the scope conditions of this study. And the effect of structural complexity on perceptions is very modest, accounting for about nine percent of the variance (16 percent with friendship controlled). Other factors clearly play a role in news sources perceptions of critical content. However, as noted above, the findings in this study are consistent with a growing body of evidence which shows that corporate structure produces a more vigorous press. The key advantage of this study is that it uses an alternative method to test the editorial vigor hypothesis, which is an ideal goal of scientific research.

Future research should seek to establish an empirical linkage between content and actual public policy decisions.[72] This would include, at a minimum, studies that strive to understand (1) the processes and methods that elites or mainstream groups and citizen or challenging groups use to enlist the media to serve their own interests or goals; (2) the impact that critical content has on these groups and public policy making;[73] and (3) the impact, if any, that changes in policy, laws or social structure have on these groups as well as the media (feedback effects). The goal of such research should, ideally, be focused on finding ways to make media more responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups and those who have been denied access to status and power.

ENDNOTES

1. See, e.g., J. Herbert Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs* (New York: Longman, 1984); W. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1988); George A. Donohue, Phillip J. Tichenor and Clarice N. Olien, "Media Evaluations and Group

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Power," in *The News Media in National and International Conflict,* eds. Andrew Arno and Wimal Dissanayake (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 203-215; Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (NY: Pantheon, 1988); David L. Paletz, Peggy Reichert and Barbara McIntyre, "How the Media Support Local Government Authority," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 35 (spring 1971): 80-92; Leon Sigal, *Reporters and Officials* (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1973); David L. Paletz and Robert N. Entman, *Media Power Politics* (NY: Macmillan, 1981); Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue and Clarice N. Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980); and Gaye Tuchman, *Making News* (New York: Free Press, 1978).

2. For a more thorough treatment of this criticism, see David Pearce Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper: Fact or Fiction?* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996).

3. David Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure, Editorial Page Vigor, and Social Change," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly 73* (winter 1996): 857-877.

4. Corporate newspapers are more profitable because they benefit from economies of scale. For a comprehensive review of studies on this topic and other studies of organizational structure, see Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper.*

5. David Pearce Demers, "Corporate Structure and Emphasis on Profits and Product Quality at U.S. Daily Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 68 (spring/summer 1991): 15-26; David Pearce Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure, Profits and Organizational Goals," *The Journal of Media Economics* 9 (spring 1996): 1-23; and David Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure and Profits Revisited: Was I Wrong?" paper to be presented at the annual meeting of AEJMC (Chicago, July 28 to August 2, 1997).

6. Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure, Editorial Page Vigor, and Social Change."

7. Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure, Editorial Page Vigor, and Social Change."

8. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly,* 4th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); James Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1996); Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); Andrew Kreig, *Spiked: How Chain Management Corrupted America's Oldest Newspaper* (Old Saybrook, CT: Peregrine Press, 1987); John H. McManus, *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994); James D. Squires, *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers* (NY: Times Books, 1994); and Doug Underwood, *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom: How the Marketers and Managers Are Reshaping Today's Media* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1985).

9. The assumption here is that those in power are more likely to be moved to instituting social change when criticized by other mainstream institutions. A pure structuralist might argue that source awareness is not a necessary factor for social change to occur, but a model that does not incorporate social action has a more difficult time specifying the linkage between organizational structure and social change.

10. Surveying sources to test the corporate-vigor hypothesis is not necessarily superior to surveys of journalists' values or content analyses of editorial-page content, nor does the source approach eliminate measurement error. However, the assumption here is that the strength of a theory is enhanced when multiple methods, measures and samples are used to test its propositions. This approach, which has been called constructive replication, is widely encouraged in the communication and social sciences. See, e.g., Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction,* 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987), 39-40 and Roger D. Wimmer and L. N. Reid, "Willingness of Communication Researchers to Respond to Replication Requests," *Journalism Quarterly* 59 (summer 1982): 317-319.

11. The first six items in this list are adapted from Peter M. Blau and Marshall W. Meyer, *Bureaucracy in Modern Society*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1987), 19-22; Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1964); and H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Eds. *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946). The seventh is taken from Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper.*

12. Max Weber coined the term "ideal type," which is a theoretical rather than empirical concept that is useful for theorizing or discussing theories about social phenomena.

13. A comprehensive review is available in Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper*.

14. Structural pluralism may be defined as the number and variety of groups and organizations in a social system. See Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press*, 16.

15. Warren Breed, "Mass Communication and Sociocultural Integration," *Social Forces 37* (1958): 109-116; George A. Donohue, Clarice N. Olien and Phillip J. Tichenor, "Reporting Conflict by Pluralism, Newspaper Type and Ownership," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (autumn 1985): 489-499, 507; Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting* (New York: Free Press, 1952); and Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

16. Wilson has shown that as population increases, heterogeneity increases, partly because the probability that there will be enough people (i.e., critical mass) to form a group that exhibits alternative views increases. Thomas C. Wilson, "Community Population Size and Social Heterogeneity: An Empirical Test," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (March 1986): 1154-1169.

17. The corporate form of organization is itself a product of a pluralistic environment. See, e.g., David Pearce Demers, "Structural Pluralism, Intermedia Competition and the Growth of the Corporate Newspaper in the United States," *Journalism Monographs,* 145 (June 1994).

18. See, e.g., Wilson, "Community Population Size and Social Heterogeneity: An Empirical Test."

19. As Donohue, Tichenor and Olien point out: "Conflict control may include the *generation* of conflict situations as well as the direct dissipation of tension. This principle is widely recognized in the political realm ... . Media reporting of a clash between scientific opinion on supersonic transports and governmental policies regarding such technology represents a generating of conflict. From a systems perspective, such reporting is functional for maintenance of the total system... . See George A. Donohue, Phillip J. Tichenor and Clarice N.

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Olien, "Mass Media Functions, Knowledge and Social Control," *Journalism Quarterly* 50 (winter 1973): 653-654. Also see Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956) for a discussion how conflict may contribute to social stability.

20. Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure, Editorial Page Vigor, and Social Control."

21. Byron St. Dizier, "Editorial Page Editors and Endorsements: Chain-Owned vs. Independent Newspapers," *Newspaper Research Journal* 8 (Fall 1986): 63-68; Ralph Thrift, Jr., "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Vigor of Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 54 (Summer 1977): 327-331; Daniel B. Wackman, Donald M. Gillmor, Cecilie Gaziano and Everette E. Dennis, "Chain Newspaper Autonomy as Reflected in Presidential Campaign Endorsements," *Journalism Quarterly* 52 (Autumn 1975): 411-420.

22. Gerald H. Borstel, "Ownership, Competition and Comment," *Journalism Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1956): 220-222; John C. Busterna and Kathleen A. Hansen, "Presidential Endorsement Patterns by Chain-Owned Papers, 1976-84," *Journalism Quarterly* 67 (Summer 1990): 286-294; Cecilie Gaziano, "Chain Newspaper Homogeneity and Presidential Endorsements, 1972-1980," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (Winter 1989): 844-845; Loren Ghiglione, *The Buying and Selling of America's Newspapers* (Indianapolis, IN: R. J. Berg, 1984); Gerald L. Grotta, "Consolidation of Newspapers: What Happens to the Consumer," *Journalism Quarterly* 48 (Summer 1971): 245-250; F. Dennis Hale, "Editorial Diversity and Concentration," in Robert G. Picard, Maxwell E. McCombs, James P. Winter, and Stephen Lacy, eds. *Press Concentration and Monopoly* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988), 161-176; Ronald H. Wagenberg and Walter C. Soderlund, "The Influence of Chain Ownership on Editorial Comment in Canada," *Journalism Quarterly* 52 (Spring 1975): 93-98;

23. Roya Akhavan-Majid and Timothy Boudreau, "Chain Ownership, Organizational Prominence, and Editorial Role Perceptions" (Paper delivered at AEJMC annual convention, Atlanta, 1994); Roya Akhavan-Majid, Anita Rife, and Sheila Gopinath, "Chain Ownership and Editorial Independence: A Case Study of Gannett Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 68 (Spring/Summer 1991): 59-66; David Bruce Daugherty, "Group-Owned Newspapers vs. Independently Owned Newspapers: An Analysis of the Difference and Similarities" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1983); Mark Lee Goodman, "Newspaper Ownership and the Weekly Editorial in Illinois" (M.A. thesis, South Dakota State University, 1982);

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"News and Editorial Independence: A Survey of Group and Independent Editors," American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 1980; Walter I. Romanow and Walter C. Soderlund, "Thomson Newspapers' Acquisition of 'The Globe and Mail': A Case Study of Content Change," *Gazette* 41 (1988): 5-17; Kenneth Rystrom, "The Impact of Newspaper Endorsements," *Newspaper Research Journal* 4 (Winter 1986): 19-28; and G. Cleveland Wilhoit and Dan G. Drew, "Editorial Writers on American Daily Newspapers: A 20-Year Portrait," *Journalism Monographs* 129 (October 1991): 31.

24. Patrick Parsons, John Finnegan, Jr., and William Benham, "Editors and Their Roles," pp. 91-104 in Robert G. Picard, Maxwell E. McCombs, James P. Winter and Stephen Lacy (eds.), *Press Concentration and Monopoly* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988).

25. See Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper*, Chapter 4, and Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure, Editorial Page Vigor, and Social Control."

26. David Demers, "Corporate News Structure and Control of Editorial Content: An Empirical Test of the Managerial Revolution Hypothesis," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association (Montreal, May 1997).

27. Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper*, see Chapter 4.

28. David K. Demers, "Corporate News Structure, Social Control and Social Change," in David K. Demers and K. Viswanath (eds), *Mass Media, Social Control and Social Change* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1998).

29. Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure, Editorial Page Vigor, and Social Change," 870-871.

30. Roya Akhavan-Majid, Anita Rife, and Sheila Gopinath, "Chain Ownership and Editorial Independence: A Case Study of Gannett Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 68 (spring/summer 1991): 59-66.

31. Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper*, see Chapters 7 and 10.

32. George Gladney, "Newspaper Excellence: How Editors of Small and Large Papers Judge Quality," *Newspaper Research Journal* 11 (spring 1990): 59-71.

33. Stephen Lacy and James Berstein, "Daily Newspaper's Relationship to Publication Cycle and Newspaper Size," *Newspaper Research Journal* 9 (spring 1988): 49-58.

34. Stephen Lacy, "Effects of Groups Ownership on Daily Newspaper Content," *Journal of Media Economics* 4 (spring 1991): 35-47.

35. Roya Akhavan-Majid and Timothy Boudreau, "Chain Ownership, Organizational Size, and Editorial Role Perceptions," *Journalism Quarterly* 72 (winter 1995): 863-873.

36. George A. Donohue, Phillip J. Tichenor and Clarice N. Olien, "Mass Media Functions, Knowledge and Social Control," *Journalism Quarterly 66* (1973): 652-659 and Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper.*

37. See endnote 1.

38. George A. Donohue, Phillip J. Tichenor and Clarice N. Olien, "A Guard Dog Perspective on the Role of the Media," *Journal of Communication* 45 (spring 1995): 115-132.

39. For a historical treatment of this transition, see Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper,* Chapter 2.

40. See Parsons, Finnegan and Benham, "Editors and Their Roles," and Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper*, Chapter 4.

41. Talcott Parsons, taking issue with Karl Marx, argued that values play a major role is social control and are highly resistant to change. Marx argued that the economic institutions were more difficult to change — values were, for the most part, epiphenomena.

42. Some media observers also believe the media initiate social movements and social change. But rarely is this the case. The environmental movement is a case in point. Mainstream media ignored for many years the concerns raised by biologists about the effects of DDT. Rather, it was the

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publication of Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* in the early 1960s that played a pivotal role in mobilizing people and resources for the environmental movement. Media coverage came afterward.

43. Some evidence to support this proposition is found in David L. Protess, Fay Lomax Cook, Jack C. Doppelt, James S. Ettema, Margaret T. Gordon, Donna R. Leff, and Peter Miller, *The Journalism of Outrage: Investigative Reporting and Agenda-Building in America* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).

44. The author of this paper thought the response rate for the police reporter group would have been the lowest because the mailings were not personally addressed. This was not the case.

45. A respondent's position in the organizational hierarchy may have a substantial effect on perceptions of organizational goals, etc. Had there been a correlation between role and circulation, it would have been necessary to control for role when examining the effects of corporate structure.

46. For dichotomous measures, the proportion is just a special case of the mean when the values are zero and one.

47. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization,* trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1964 [1947]) and H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

48. See, e.g., Peter M. Blau and Marshall W. Meyer, *Bureaucracy in Modern Society*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1987).

49. Circulation also is a good indicator of the division of labor and organizational complexity, but it was not used in the index here because it also measures consumer demand.

50. The first two measures were worded as follows: "How many full-time reporters and editors and how many full-time employees are employed at your newspaper? (Please estimate if exact number not known)."

51. "In which of the following beats or areas does your newspaper employ at least one full-time reporter? (Please check all that apply): business, sports, book reviews, arts, real estate, health, national, state, food, home, science, technology,

metro, international, lifestyles, travel, fashion and education."

52. "For a general assignment reporter to become the top editor of the newspaper, how many promotions typically would he or she have to receive? (For example, if a newspaper employs assistant city editors, a city editor and an editor-in-chief, the total number of promotions needed to become the top editor is three.)"

53. Respondents were asked to rate 22 items in terms of the amount of importance top management places on them. Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale ranging from "not very important" to "extremely important."

54. "Is your newspaper owned by a chain or group, or is it independently owned?" Chain ownership was coded "1"; independent ownership, "0." The value for this measure (67%) was slightly lower than the estimate in *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* (about 80%). The discrepancy probably stems from an under-reporting of chain ownership; that is, some publishers and journalists who work for small chains that are family owned do not appear to see their newspapers as chains because that term connotes a large, impersonal organization. In terms of measurement error, this would not appear to pose a major problem, however, since many small chains come closer to matching the characteristics of the entrepreneurial than the corporate model.

55. "Is your newspaper owned privately or can the public through the purchase of stock or other means own part or all of your newspaper?" Public ownership coded "1"; all others "0."

56. "Is your newspaper a sole proprietorship, a partnership or a corporation?" Corporation coded "1"; all others a "0."

57. "Does one *individual or family* own or control more than a 50 percent interest in your newspaper?" A "no" response was coded "1"; a "yes" was "0."

58. This item was coded from *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook.*

59. Some of the ownership measures are dichotomous. Although factor analysis technically requires continuous measures, like regression analysis it is a very robust technique and there is no evidence to suggest that the analysis distorted the data.

60. In other words, it was not expected that the items for division of labor would load on the same factor as the items for rules and procedures; however, these two factors should be positively correlated to some extent. Many researchers also prefer oblique rotation to varimax, especially in exploratory analysis, because if all of the factors identified are orthogonal, the results of the oblique rotation will be very similar to a varimax rotation. A factor loading of .60 was used as a rule of thumb for determining whether a measure should be included with a particular factor, and measures that had two or more loadings greater than .30 and less than .60 were considered problematic. For a discussion of factor analysis, see Jae-On Kim and Charles W. Mueller, *Introduction to Factor Analysis* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1978) and *Factor Analysis: Statistical Methods and Practical Issues* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1978).

61. David Pearce Demers, "Corporate Structure and Emphasis on Profits and Product Quality at U.S. Daily Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly,* 68:15-26 (1991).

62. Polich, "Predicting Newspaper Staff Size from Circulation." It will be argued later, however, that chain ownership is no longer a good measure of organizational complexity in cross-sectional studies because it is so widely diffused.

63. David Pearce Demers, "Corporate Newspaper Structure and Editorial-Page Vigor," paper presented to the International Communication Association (Albuquerque, May 1995). Chain ownership is still a useful measure in longitudinal studies, however, since the variance is being measured over time.

64. Roger Mansfield, "Bureaucracy and Centralization: An Examination of Organizational Structure," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 18:477-88 (1973).

65. See, e.g., Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press,* or Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper: Fact or Fiction?*

66. *Ibid.* Overall, population usually is the single best measure because it is correlated with all these measures.

67. George E. Hall and Deirdre A. Gaquin (eds.), *1997 County and City Extra: Annual Metro, City, and County Data Book* (Lanham, Md.: Bernan Press, 1997). The column numbers for the six measures are 4, 54, 57, 104, and 107. City

population was taken from the *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook.*

68. The exact question was: "Would you consider the publisher a person friend? Yes or No?" About 23 percent of the sources said "yes." Note that this percentage is a mean value, since the responses of the sources are averaged in communities where more than one public official responded.

69. Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper: Fact or Fiction?*

70. The model was also tested for interaction effects (interaction between structural pluralism and structural complexity), but the interaction term was not a significant predictor.

71. Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper: Fact or Fiction?*

72. See, e.g., Protess, et al., *The Journalism of Outrage.*

73. A plethora of research exists on individual effects, but communication researchers have sorely neglected group and social processes. One exception is David L. Protess, Fay Lomax Cook, Jack C. Doppelt, James S. Ettema, Margaret T. Gordon, Donna R. Leff, and Peter Miller, *The Journalism of Outrage: Investigative Reporting and Agenda-Building in America* (NY: Guilford Press, 1991).

Table 1. Corporate Newspaper Measures Factor-Analyzed[a]

	Factor Loadings					CE[b]
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	
1. Structural Complexity						
Number full-time reporters/editors	**.98**	.02	-.04	-.13	.02	.91
Number full-time employees	**.93**	-.01	-.08	-.11	.00	.81
Number beats or departments	**.91**	-.05	.03	.09	.01	.88
Number promotions needed for reporter to become top editor	**.68**	-.00	.15	.23	.04	.65
2. Ownership Structure						
Owned by chain or group	-.16	**.78**	.11	-.05	-.01	.63
Public ownership possible	.18	**.78**	-.01	.07	-.02	.67
Legally incorporated business	.00	**.73**	.15	-.27	-.02	.57
Not owned/controlled by one individual/family	.01	**.65**	-.07	.17	.39	.65
Number of newspapers in chain[c]	-.05	.56	-.39	.49	-.18	.75
3. Rules & Regulations						
Has employee handbook of rules	-.04	-.03	**.88**	.06	.05	.78
Has formal, written code of ethics	.06	.22	**.73**	.10	.00	.66
4. Hire College Graduates						
Reporters need bachelor's degree	-.03	-.16	.12	**.78**	.14	.66
Has own style book[c]	.21	.09	.24	.45	-.16	.43
5. Rational Decision-Making						
Importance placed on finding most efficient way to solve problems	.05	.04	.05	.02	**.92**	.87
EIGENVALUES	3.73	2.64	1.53	1.08	.95	9.93
PERCENT OF VARIANCE	26%	19%	11%	8%	7%	71%

[a] Principal components, oblique rotation (N=199).

[b] Communality Estimates (i.e., total variance explained)

[c] Measures excluded from indices because of low or mixed loadings.

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Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations Between Corporate Measures and Structural Pluralism

Corporate Measures	1	2	3	4	5	Structural Pluralism
1. Structural Complexity	1.00	.06	.26**	.11*	.18**	.52**
2. Ownership Structure	.06	1.00	.23**	.10*	.07	.02
3. Rules & Procedures	.26**	.23**	1.00	.26**	.22**	.11*
4. Rational Decision Making	.11*	.10*	.26**	1.00	.05	.07
5. Hire College Graduates	.18**	.07	.22**	.05	1.00	.07
Corporate Index (sum of 1 through 5 above)	.57**	.52**	.68**	.56**	.52**	.28**

*p<.05; **p<.01

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Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Critical Content and Pluralism Indices

Measures	Mean	SD
Index of Perceived Critical Content Index (sum of items 1 through 10 divided by 10)		
How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (5-point scale from strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5] where "3" is neutral)		
1. The local daily often writes editorials that criticize city hall.	3.1	1.1
2. The local daily newspaper often writes editorials that criticize me or my policies.	2.4	1.1
3. During the last year, I have complained to editors about its coverage of me or my office.	2.7	1.2
How would you rate the local daily in terms of how it covers your office or department? (5-point scale with bi-polar adjectives)		
4. Is unfair/Is fair*	3.5	1.1
5. Doesn't tell the whole story / Tells the whole story*	2.7	1.1
6. Is too critical / Is too supportive*	2.7	0.7
7. Takes my concerns into account / Does not take my concerns into account	3.1	1.0
8. Separates fact and opinion in news stories / Does not separate fact and opinion	3.3	1.1
9. Reporters can be trusted / Reporters cannot be trusted	3.0	1.2
10. Does a good job covering my office or department / Does a poor job	2.9	1.1
Index of Structural Pluralism (Items 1 through 6 below, standardized and summed)		
1. City population	141,811	588,165
2. County population	487,217	1,377,197
3. Percent of county population with a bachelor's degree or higher	19.0%	9.4%
4. County per capita income	$13,718	$4,004
5. Percent of county population employed in professional, managerial or technical jobs	28.2%	7.8%
6. Number of nonfarm business establishments	14,139	36,378

*These items were inverted before summing to create the index.

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Table 4. Zero-Order Correlations Between Perceived Critical Measures, Structural Pluralism and Corporate Index Measures

			Corporate Index Measures				
	Structural Pluralism	Corporate Index (183)	Structural Complexity (199)	Ownership Structure (189)	Rules and Procedures (201)	Rational Decision Making (202)	Hire College Grads (198)
Perceived Critical Index (Sum of 10 items below)	.15**	.30**	.31**	.12*	.13*	.04	.17**
Is not fair	.16**	.25**	.31**	.04	.13*	.05	.14*
Is too critical	.14*	.21**	.27**	.05	.05	.07	.07
Have complained to editors about news coverage	.13*	.16*	.27**	.04	.07	-.04	.08
Often writes editorials that criticize city hall	.12*	.13*	.17**	.05	.09	-.08	.12*
Does a poor job covering my office/departments	.11*	.24**	.21**	.06	.11*	.04	.18**
Often writes editorials that criticize me	.11*	.15*	.25**	.14*	.08	-.06	-.01
Doesn't tell the whole story	.10*	.22**	.22**	.12*	.12*	.05	.05
Does not separate fact and opinion in news stories	.09	.25**	.20**	.08	.09	.09	.21**
Reporters cannot be trusted	.07	.28**	.15**	.19**	.09	.15**	.14*
Does not take my concerns into account	.05	.17**	.13*	.06	.03	.05	.19**

*p<.05; **p<.01
Sample sizes shown in parentheses

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Table 5. Perceived Critical Coverage Index Regressed on Pluralism, Corporate Index and Relationship With Publisher

Model Number	Zero-Order Correlation	Partial Correlation	Slope	SE of Slope	Beta	F	R^2
1. Structural Pluralism	.15**	.17*	.140	.061	.17*		
Corporate Index	.30**	.24**	.323	.098	.24**	11.1	.11
2. Structural Pluralism	.15**	.01	.011	.064	.01		
Structural Complexity	.31**	.27**	.072	.019	.30**	10.4	.10
3. Structural Pluralism	.15**	.15*	.117	.059	.14*		
Corporate Index	.30**	.21**	.277	.010	.21**		
Personal Friend of Publisher	-.29**	-.28**	-.515	.134	-.27**	13.0	.18
4. Structural Pluralism	.15**	-.01	-.004	.062	-.01		
Structural Complexity	.31**	.26**	.067	.018	.28**		
Personal Friend of Publisher	-.29**	-.27**	-.511	.133	-.26**	12.3	.16

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

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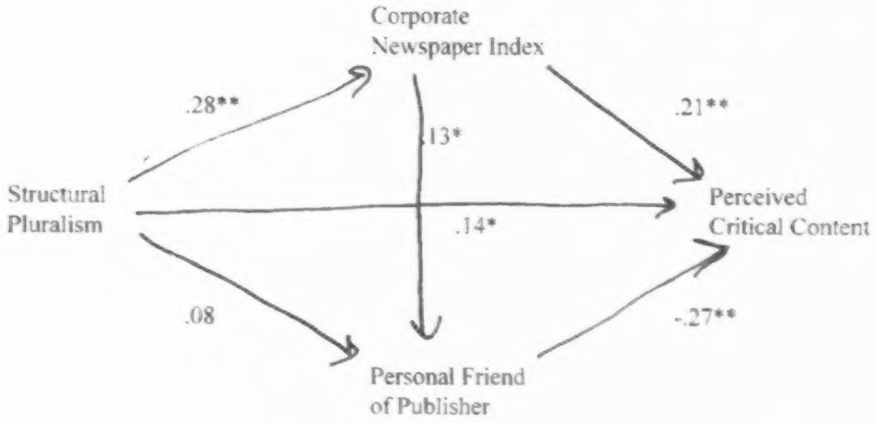
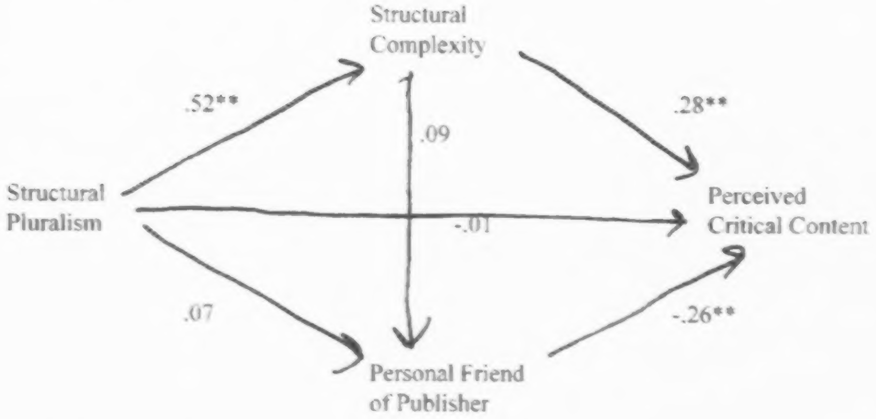
Figure 1. Summary Path Model

Path Model #1


Corporate
Newspaper Index
.28**
.21**
.13*
Structural
Pluralism
Perceived
Critical Content
.14*
.08
-.27**
Personal Friend
of Publisher

Path Model #2


Structural
Complexity
.52**
.28**
.09
Structural
Pluralism
Perceived
Critical Content
-.01
.07
-.26**
Personal Friend
of Publisher

*p<.05, **p<.01

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Handling Hate:
A Content Analysis of Washington State's Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes and White Supremacists

By

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Handling Hate:
A Content Analysis of Washington State's Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes and White Supremacists

Washington's newspapers aggressively cover white supremacist hate groups and do a fair job of reporting hate crimes. Hate crimes were best covered, and sometimes only covered, when committed by hate groups. Violent crimes, particularly assault, tend to be downplayed. This creates an inaccurate community portrait of local hate crimes. Because media coverage in large part shapes public opinion, communities may fail to respond to the true nature of hate in their midst.

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Handling Hate: A Content Analysis of Washington State's Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes and White Supremacists

If all the journalists from all the mainstream newspapers in the United States could be gathered in one place, they would come to agree on only a handful of things. One issue probably would find an easy consensus: That it is morally repugnant to violently assault people just because of the color of their skin or the house where they worship. However, violent assaults against members of minority groups tend to go largely unreported.

Newspaper headlines within the state of Washington tend to portray hate crimes in a fairly consistent way: Skinheads from out-of-town storm through communities spraypainting dirty words on churches and schools. Ninety-eight of the 134 hate-related stories found in Washington newspapers during 1996 involved someone from a hate group, such as the Aryan Nations or the Ku Klux Klan. Readers may assume these "others" who commit hate crimes all also tattoo themselves with Nazi slogans and wear an inordinate amount of camouflage. If trends in journalistic coverage matched real-world police findings, then we could easily identify the hate mongers and confine them to remote compounds in a distant state.

However, throughout the United States, no evidence has surfaced to indicate that roving bands of neo-Nazis are the primary perpetrators of hate crimes. The National Church Arson Task Force, formed by presidential order and composed of 200 federal agents, investigated more than 300 church arsons that occurred between 1995 and 1997, including two fires in Washington state. More than 140 suspects were arrested in connection with 107 church fires, yet only a handful of these suspects were linked to conspiracy in multiple fires, and those were within narrow geographic regions.[1] There is a national epidemic of hate or bias-related violence. This epidemic was not imported, but grown and spread locally.

Walter Lippman said: “The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event.”[2] Lippman believed that journalists are, and should be, responsible for creating that mental picture.

Most newspapers within Washington aggressively report on hate groups and attempt to cover hate crimes. At least 30 daily and weekly newspapers within the state reported on a hate group or at least one hate crime during 1996. However, Washington’s journalists may be misleading the public as to the true nature of hate crimes and those who may be the common carriers of hate. Hate crimes were best covered, and sometimes only covered, when they were committed by hate groups.

This paper examines 134 articles from 30 Washington newspapers and attempts to determine how the state’s journalists are helping paint the picture of hate within their own hometowns.

Agenda Setting and Hate Crimes

In 1972, Shaw and McCombs first empirically identified the connection between the volume of news stories on a political issue and the salience of that issue for voters. “The mass media both focus attention and structure our cognitions,” they wrote.[3] Despite professional assumptions of objectivity, journalists – consciously or unconsciously – tend to spotlight and frame key issues.

When examining the wealth of agenda-setting research over the past quarter century, Dearing and Rogers draw a series of conclusions about media effects on public awareness. Most notable here is that "real-world indicators are relatively unimportant in setting the media agenda."[4] Wars and famines in distant countries, regardless of their magnitude, mean little to nothing to the U.S. public without media cues and coverage.

> The number of news stories measures the relative salience of an issue of study on the media agenda. Audience individuals presumably judge the relative importance of an issue on the basis of the number of media messages about the issue to which they were exposed.[5]

Readers tend to value issues that receive intensive media coverage and devalue issues that receive limited coverage.

The mobilization model of investigative reporting suggests that journalists play a crucial role in bringing true societal change. Media reports force the public, individually and collectively, to alter what Lippman would call "the pictures inside our heads." Readers must reconsider their community's inherent goodness when they see a front-page photograph of a neighbor in handcuffs. Grassroot support for government policy reform and community action grows out of changes in public opinion.[6] However, change may not occur effectively, or even at all, if there is a gap between the true nature of a problem and what appears in newspapers.

Research Questions

This research analyzes the media agenda by comparing stories on hate crimes to the information available about crimes committed, and by comparing hate crime coverage to coverage of hate groups. At least four questions can be considered in researching newspaper coverage:

1) Will more hate-related stories be reported about events, incidents and problems outside the immediate community than those reported inside?

2) Will stories involving hate groups be reported more frequently than those where hate groups are not identified?

3) Will stories involving hate groups be reported more prominently, appearing on the front page, than stories where no hate group is identified?

4) Will stories about hate trends and profiles of white supremacists appear more frequently than stories about individual crimes?

These questions consider how Washington newspapers help shape public awareness and ultimately the public agenda. The number of local actors identified in hate crimes stories creates a sense of local impact. However, a disproportionate focus on hate groups allows the public to marginalize and thus ignore the crimes and the criminals, particularly when individual incidents go undercovered in newspapers.

Methodology

The state of Washington was selected for study because of its mix of urban and rural communities, as well as the recent surfacing of militias and hate groups in the region. Washington ranked 11th in the nation for hate crime reports, and was the leader in hate crime reporting by far for the Pacific Northwest states.[7]

Newspapers were selected as the news medium of choice because the availability of archived information. The Southern Poverty Law Center of Montgomery, Ala., collected 134 articles concerning hate crimes and hate groups published in daily and weekly newspapers within the state of Washington during 1996. Southern Poverty staff members cataloged these articles, gathered from two clipping services, by state, region and year. Articles include coverage of hate crimes, profiles of white supremacists and the activities of white separatist militia groups.

Articles were coded using representative categories:

- Newspaper
- Type of crime
- Location of crime
- Number of victims
- Number of offenders
- Race of offender
- Proximity of offenders (meaning locals or out-of-towners)
- Bias motivation (anti-Black, anti-Jewish, anti-Gay, etc.)
- Whether a hate group was identified in the news story
- Whether the story identified crime as possible hate crime
- Whether police reported the incident as a hate crime
- Origin of Story (Locally written or wire generated)
- Location of Event/Problem (Local, other region, national, etc.)
- Type of story (Crime coverage, editorial, etc.)
- Story placement

These categories were then analyzed by frequencies and compared with the composite and individual hate crime reports from the Washington State Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs.

Limitations to Research

The validity of this research depends on several external forces. These include the thoroughness of the Southern Poverty Center archives' clipping services, the accuracy of local police agencies in identifying hate crimes for the Washington State Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, and the willingness of victims to report hate crimes.

Southern Poverty's archives include a full range of article types, from four-line crime briefs to four-color front-page stories.

Police accuracy in reporting crimes appears to vary greatly from state to state. The FBI asks each police agency in the nation to report hate crime incidents voluntarily. Louisiana has 140 police agencies that participated in the FBI reporting process in 1996. Those agencies serve a total of 2.6 million Louisiana residents. Only 6 incidents of hate crimes were reported from Louisiana. By contrast, 131 agencies from Maine, serving 1.2 million people, reported 58 incidents that year.[8] Are more hate crimes really committed in Maine than Louisiana? Perhaps there are; perhaps there are not. The FBI notes that improving the quality and quantity of reports is an evolving process.[9] Only 16 percent of 11,400 agencies in the nation reported even one or more hate crimes to the FBI in 1996. At the same time, the national number of agencies submitting hate crime statistics grew by 18 percent, while the number of participants has jumped dramatically every year since national reporting began in 1990.[10] These figures indicate the struggle local police organizations have in identifying hate crimes, regardless of their willingness to participate in the FBI program. The numbers of hate crimes reported by police may not reflect the reality of hate crime in this country.

This research did not compare coverage between crimes identified as hate-related and those that were not. Therefore, some general reporting trends influencing the results may go unidentified.

The willingness of victims to report crimes is even more difficult to gauge. David Della, head of Washington's Commission on Asian and Pacific American Affairs, said: "A lot of people don't trust police agencies. Others consider it a private matter, so they don't make a big deal out of it."[11] The unwillingness to report greatly limits a local newspaper journalist's ability to follow hate crime in the community. Those suspicious of the police also may be suspicious of the media.

This paper does not attempt to validate or question the accuracy of police hate crime reports, though that accuracy may influence how newspapers present hate crimes to their communities. This research looks at the composite images the state's newspapers collectively create.

Washington Police Reports of Hate Crimes

The number of hate crimes reported to Washington police agencies declined in 1996, as it had the previous two years. In 1996, the Washington State Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs identified 284 offenses in 199 bias-related incidents. This indicated a 24-percent drop in the number of incidents and a 3-percent increase in the number of victims compared with the previous year.[12] (The distinction between offenses and incidents is important here. Offenses involve possible criminal charges. Several offenses may occur in a single incident.)

Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment leaders and others were uncertain whether the decline in Washington's overall incidents indicated an actual drop in crimes or a decline in victim reporting. Coalition director Bill Wassmuth suspected a "growing apathy and cynicism regarding the reporting of bias crimes both on the part of victims and law enforcement."[13]

Most crimes identified by the Washington State Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs involved racial and ethnic biases. Those of African origin were targeted in 80 incidents, while those of Hispanic, Asian and European origin were targeted 15 times each. Religious attacks were most often levied against Jews, with a total of 17 incidents reported. Homosexuals reported 31 incidents of hate crimes. Overall, 70 incidents occurred in a home, 34 on a street or highway and 18 at a school or college. Half of the reported crimes were committed by Caucasians.[14]

The state's police agencies reported a total 284 hate crime offenses during 1996: 134 offenses (47 percent) were intimidation, 90 offenses (32 percent) were assault, and 45 offenses (15 percent) involved vandalism. One murder was identified as a hate crime. No bias-related rapes were reported in the state.

Washington Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes

Washington newspaper readers saw 134 articles about hate or bias-related crimes and hate groups, including white supremacist militias. Nearly two-thirds of these stories involved actual crimes or criminal trials. Another 17 percent involved profiles of white supremacists and those who oppose them, including Southern Poverty Law Center director Morris Dees, members of the NAACP and others. The "hate fighter profiles" often appeared as previews to book tours and speeches.[15] Similarly, the white supremacist profiles appeared in connection to hate rallies and organizational events,[16] as well as localized response to national coverage of militia groups.[17]

Washington Newspaper Coverage of Bias by Story Type

Type of Story	Frequency	Percentage
Hate crime	50	37%
Militia-related crimes	41	31%
White supremacist profile	16	12%
Hate fighter profile	7	5%
Trend	6	4.5%
Hate parades	5	4%
Other	5	4%
Lawsuit	2	1.5%
Letter/Editorial	2	1.5%
Total	**134**	**100%**

Readers of newspapers and readers of police reports saw different images of hate crimes for the state of Washington. The newspapers identified hate crimes in 50 stories: 19 stories (38 percent) involved vandalism, 12 stories (24 percent) involved intimidation, and 11 stories (22 percent) involved assault. Considering the volume of newspaper stories alone, careful newspaper readers logically would conclude that hate crimes often involved vandalism and sometimes involved intimidation and assault, yet these assumptions do not reflect the actual police reports of offenses.

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Washington Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes Compared to Police Identified Offenses

Crime	Newspaper Articles	% of Newspaper All Articles	Police Identified Offenses	% of Identified Offenses
Vandalism	19	38%	45	16%
Intimidation	12	24%	134	47%
Assault	11	22%	90	32%
Other	8	16%	15	5%
Totals	**50**	**100%**	**284**	**100%**

It is not surprising that stories with more visual appeal, such as vandalism, would receive disproportionate coverage compared with stories with no visual elements, particularly intimidation. However, the placement of these stories is of some concern when considering an overall image of hate crimes. Seven of the 19 vandalism stories appeared on page one, including five with photographs. All the vandalism stories included descriptions of the language scrawled in these destructive acts, and many included words such as "Nazi" and "KKK," regardless of whether the perpetrator(s) had a direct connection with those groups.[18] Therefore, a reader reasonably could connect the vandals to hate groups, regardless of whether the suspect was identified as belonging to a hate group.

Assault, a much more violent and personal crime, generally was downplayed in the regular news pages. Only one assault story appeared on page one, there with a picture of the badly beaten victim lying in a hospital bed. Four stories were on inside pages and the remaining six were in police blotters or crime briefs. The state's one bias-related murder was not reported as a hate crime in newspapers at all.

A hate group was identified in six of the 11 assault stories. This indicates a tendency to report hate group-related assaults. However, when Washington's hate groups have committed violent acts, these acts are targeted generally at government entities and institutions rather than against individuals. Therefore, a majority of the assaults went uncovered as hate crimes.

Four intimidation stories (a third of the total) did appear on page one with photographs. That represents a greater placement proportion than any of the other types of hate crimes.

Washington Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes by Group Identification

Crime	**Hate Group Identified**	**Hate Group Unidentified**	**Totals**
Assault	6	5	11
Arson	3	0	3
Intimidation	4	8	12
Vandalism	5	14	19
Other	4	1	5
Totals	**22**	**28**	**50**

The resulting statewide picture was contradictory: Vandalism was covered and covered fairly well; intimidation, if it was covered, often appeared on page one. Yet assaults appeared in the crime briefs, just like any other violent crime. Newspapers covered hate crimes most prominently when the offense most clearly could be perceived as a bias-related act.

The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs' cataloging system made it difficult to correlate police reports and newspaper articles. However, coders were able to link 36 of the 50 hate crime articles to police reports. When comparing the numbers of newspaper articles to the number of police reports, newspapers covered hate crimes against Caucasians at a proportionately greater rate than crimes against other groups, though this number could not be considered statistically significant. Notably, the articles involving crimes against multiple minority groups tended to be against African Americans and those of Hispanic origin, and African Americans and Jews.

Washington Newspaper Coverage of Hate Crimes Compared to Police Reports of Hate Crime Incidents

Bias	**Newspaper Articles**	**% of Newspaper All Articles**	**Police Reports of Incidents**	**% of All Police Reports**
Anti-Black	13	26%	80	40%
Anti-White	3	6%	15	7.5%
Anti-Asian	1	2%	15	7.5%
Anti-Hispanic	2	4%	15	7.5%
Anti-Jewish	2	4%	17	8.5%
Anti-Gay	2	4%	31	15%
Additional Crimes				
Multiple	22	44%	3	1.5%
Other	-	-	23	11.5%
Unnamed	5	10%	-	-
Totals	**50**	**100%**	**199**	**100%**

Crimes against homosexuals warrant particular attention here. Two hate crimes against homosexuals were crimes covered by newspapers; both were assaults and described in good detail on inside news pages. However, 29 hate crimes against homosexuals went uncovered. State police numbers on assaults against homosexuals were unavailable but national numbers are included in the FBI Uniform Crime Report. Nationwide, assault made up more than 40 percent of the hate crimes against homosexuals, but only 30 percent from all other victim categories. This indicates a tendency toward assault crimes against gay men and women. If newspapers tend to avoid covering assaults, then crimes against homosexuals particularly may be undercovered.

Additional research incorporating data from other states would allow a sufficient cell size for chi-square tabulation. Cross tabulation could not be used with the Washington population alone to determine significance level. Collapsing the data values would not have produced useful results. Percentages and frequencies assist adequately in answering the research questions.

Washington Newspaper Coverage of Militias and Other Hate Groups

Newspaper coverage of individual hate crimes must be compared with coverage of the rash of bombings and bomb threats made by white supremacist, anti-government militia groups. (Notably, the state police agencies did not consider these incidents to be hate crimes, so they were not considered as such for this research. Instead, the incidents were cataloged here separately under militia-related crimes.) At least 36 stories, more than a quarter of all newspaper stories included in this research, were dedicated to coverage of two militia-related incidents and subsequent criminal proceedings.

These attacks hit home for The Spokesman-Review staff in Spokane. Three members of the Phineas Priesthood, a white supremacist militia group from northern Idaho, were convicted of detonating a bomb outside a Spokesman satellite office, then robbing and bombing a nearby bank. (The biblical book Numbers describes Priest Phinehas, who was revered for killing a mixed-race couple.)[19] The trio also was convicted for bombing a Planned Parenthood clinic then robbing the same bank branch a second time.[20] Seventeen Phineas Priests stories appeared on page one in the Spokesman during

1996 and all explained the group's racist history. Another two stories appeared in Seattle newspapers.

Meanwhile, in Seattle and nearby Bellingham, eight people connected to the Washington State Militia, another white supremacist and anti-government group, were charged with conspiring to build and stockpile pipe bombs. The group allegedly was preparing for armed confrontation with the U.S. government or the United Nations. FBI agents found more than 155 pounds of ammonium nitrate in one suspect's home. This was the same type of fertilizer believed to have been a key ingredient in the bomb that blew up the Oklahoma City federal building in 1995.[21] Federal agents investigating the Washington State Militia believed:

> Some members taught others how to make bombs out of sparklers, how to modify them using glass, marbles or barbed wire to enhance their effectiveness as fragmentation devices, and how to construct bombs using propane tanks, gunpowder and a trip wire.[22]

Ten stories covering the militia members' criminal proceedings appeared in The Seattle Post-Intelligencer and The Seattle Times. Seven stories appeared in The Bellingham Herald.

Washington Newspaper Identification of Militia-Related Crime by Story Placement

Story Placement	**Militia related Crime**	**Total Stories**	**Percent of Total**
Brief/Blotter	1	22	4.5%
Inside Photo	4	12	33.3%
Inside	19	46	41%
Pg. 1 Photo	6	25	24%
Page 1	11	27	40.7%
Opinion	-	2	-
Totals	**41**	**134**	**30.5%**

Note: Inside Photo and Pg. 1 Photo indicate that photographs appeared with news stories.

These militia-related crime stories are crucial in shaping the Washington public's perception of hate groups and made up a third of all front page articles. Coverage of these crimes emphasized that militia groups were locally formed and organized. However, other newspapers in stories unrelated to the bombings sometimes placed emphasis on distancing white supremacists from the community. The Spokane Valley Herald profiled Aryan Nations minister Richard Butler, who lived in a neighboring Idaho county, under the headline "Across State Lines and into Another Nation."[23] The Central Kitsap Reporter of Silverdale reported that a white pride group was sending out fliers from the nearby Seabeck community post office.[24] A total of 41 stories in this research involved individual hate crimes and hate groups from outside the newspapers' local circulation areas. Another 27 stories involved local groups and individuals. Newspapers with smaller circulation areas tended to manufacture geographic distance from hate crimes and hate groups, though the numbers of stories were too small to make a clear statistical assertion.

Washington Newspaper Identification of All Hate Groups by Story Placement

Story Placement	**Hate Group Identified**	**Hate Group Unidentified**	**Total**
Brief/Blotter	6	16	22
Inside Photo	11	1	12
Inside	38	8	46
Pg. 1 Photo	18	7	25
Page 1	23	4	27
Opinion	-	2	-
Total	**98**	**36**	**134**

Note: Inside Photo and Pg. 1 Photo indicate that photographs appeared with news stories.

Hate groups were identified in 22 (nearly 45 percent) of the state's 50 hate crime stories. Hate groups were identified in another 41 stories describing crimes by militias. The identification of hate groups proved to be important in how stories were placed in the newspaper. A total of 98 articles concerning hate groups appeared in Washington's newspapers, with a total of 41 articles appearing on the front pages. Only six of the 22 brief/police blotter stories (less than 27 percent) referred to hate groups. This means hate crimes are best covered when committed by members of hate groups. Stories on hate trends and profiles did not outnumber the frequency of stories on either general hate or militia-related crimes.

Conclusions

The answers to Research Questions 1 and 4 reflected favorably on Washington's newspapers. More hate-related stories concerning events, incidents and problems inside the newspaper's immediate circulation area were covered than those outside. This shows a willingness to address hometown issues rather than placing focus on problems elsewhere. Stories about individual crimes also outnumbered stories about hate trends and profiles of white supremacists. This indicates an effort to cover hate crimes in the newspapers' communities, though a greater effort should be encouraged. Washington's newspapers did not fare as well considering Research Questions 2 and 3. Stories involving hate groups appeared more frequently and prominently than those where no hate groups were identified.

Journalists should not assume they are addressing issues of bigotry in their communities by merely covering hate groups. The Aryan Nations, neo-Nazis and the Klan should be covered aggressively. But by focusing almost exclusively on hate groups, the newspaper allows the community to marginalize the undesirable and avoid confronting the most dangerous bigot – the one who doesn't have swastika tattoos. (The bigot who doesn't wear camouflage is better disguised.)

Newspaper editors also should consider the types of hate crimes emphasized. The community will not recognize the violent assaults committed against its minority members unless those assaults are lifted from police blotters and placed in the main news sections. Public understanding about the violent nature of hate crimes will not change with only 11 of the state's 90 assaults covered by newspapers. And, heterosexuals will not understand the magnitude of crimes against homosexuals if assaults, the most common crime against gays and lesbians, are underreported.

These conclusions do not suggest that some crimes, such as vandalism, should go unreported. Nor do they suggest that crimes against some minority groups should be reported less frequently to equalize coverage. Rather, journalists should consider carefully what crime stories they choose to overlook or bury in the back pages. Journalists, then, can serve as a catalyst to change the community's collective picture of hate and to inspire the action needed to combat it.

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[10] Ibid.

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SUPERSTARS or SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS?

Management and Staffing Issues Affecting Newspapers' Online Journalists

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Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
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ABSTRACT

SUPERSTARS or SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS?

Management and Staffing Issues Affecting Newspapers' Online Journalists

This paper reports preliminary findings from a survey of online and print newspaper editors, designed to identify key online staffing issues such as salary and experience levels, job classifications and benefits. The results indicate that online newspaper staffs remain small, with salaries and benefits roughly commensurate with those paid to print employees in comparable jobs. Online editors express concerns about the pressure to turn a profit, as well as about the perception that they and their staffs are seen as second-class citizens by many of their print colleagues.

SUPERSTARS or SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS?
Management and Staffing Issues Affecting Newspapers' Online Journalists

More than 1,600 U.S. newspapers now offer online products, mainly through the World Wide Web (*Editor & Publisher Online*, 1998). Approximately 500 are general-interest dailies (*AJR NewsLink*, 1998), representing roughly a third of the nation's 1,500-odd daily papers (*Facts About Newspapers*, 1997). The move online began in 1992, when *The Chicago Tribune* signed up with America Online to become the first local electronic newspaper service available nationwide (Willis, 1994). By the end of 1993, 20 papers were offering a computer-delivered product. The number was around 100 a year later; after that, the floodgates opened, with hundreds of papers large and small joining the interactive stream. Though some smaller papers recently have pulled the plug on their Web sites (Kirsner, 1997) and others are opting to watch from the sidelines (Dotinga, 1998), the general online growth trend continues.

But many of the publishers who are on the Web do not seem certain they should be there at all. When asked why they are taking their papers online, their answers boil down to a set of related fears: fears of being left behind if they fail to protect their franchise, fears of losing existing readers and being bypassed altogether by new ones, fears of losing money -- especially retail and classified ad revenue -- to new competitors. In a survey of newspaper executives taken amid the burst of online product launches in 1996, only about half said they expected the newspaper industry to be healthy in 10 years, and a majority of those who saw dark times ahead predicted that competition from online sources would be the biggest cause ("The State of the Newspaper Industry," 1996).

In the meantime, online dollars remain elusive. About a third of the papers with an online presence claim to be making money, but admittedly not much in relation to their up-front investments (Outing, 1997b) nor to the double-digit profits on the print side (Neuwirth, 1998). Some, such as *The Dallas Morning News*, admit they are doing it by keeping expenses to a minimum and online staff sizes small (Wilk, 1997). While there are indications that Web advertising may finally be picking up steam (Adler, 1997; Himelstein, 1997; Hyland, 1998), no small number of people continue to predict that newspapers will never be profitable online, that the Web is one giant black hole for publishers' cash and that their rush into cyberspace resembles nothing more than lemmings' rush over the proverbial cliff (Caruso, 1997).

So while some newspaper publishers express strong support for their online ventures (Levins, 1997; Chan, 1997), many are operating in a cloud of uncertainty, driven by the competing fears of becoming obsolete if they're not online and losing money if they are. Within the newsroom, those fears translate into a practical concern: how to maintain an online presence and maybe even learn something about the new medium -- without bleeding the budget dry. Some of the issues are technological; others involve the advertising and circulation departments. For newsroom managers, the issues under their control are primarily ones of content and therefore staffing, encompassing salaries and benefits, experience levels of new hires, and job duties of new and existing newsroom employees.

This paper looks at how U.S. newspapers are staffing their Web products and how those staffs compare with their print counterparts. Issues explored include salaries, benefits, experience and job duties.

ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

The meteoric rise of the World Wide Web -- a graphics-based interface that makes the thousands of intermeshed computer networks comprising the Internet easy enough, pretty enough and responsive enough for just about anyone to use -- has transformed the online audience into a truly mass, or at least massive, market in the 1990s. One recent survey says

62 million adults, or 30 percent of the U.S. population age 16 or older, were online as of the fourth quarter 1997 -- a 32 percent increase in a single year ("Latest Intelliquest Survey," 1998). And they're not **just** searching for the porno sites; another survey shows 20.1 million Americans report using the Internet as a source for news (Levins, 1998).

As the Web has diffused through American society, it has become a part of newspaper newsrooms in two ways. One has been a boom in its use as an information source. In 1994, the year Web browsers attained visibility, 25 percent of print journalists reported using the Internet or Web in the newsroom; in 1997, 92 percent said they used it, and more than half said they did so every day (Garrison, 1997). With more than 90 percent of journalists saying they have individual access to the Internet, the Web is increasingly relied upon as a news source; reporters say that if they cannot reach a human being, they routinely turn to company sites for information, especially during non-business hours (Ross and Middleberg, 1997).

The other way journalists have become involved in the Web is to start producing information for it. Pioneers in online content delivery, such as *The Raleigh News and Observer*, began combining the techniques and technologies of computer-assisted reporting with multimedia formats almost as soon as they became available (Moeller, 1995). "Nando.net" and other early online enterprises, including those that paired newspapers with commercial services such as Prodigy or America Online, were greeted with skepticism by many publishers who remembered all too clearly the videotex debacle of the early 1980s, in which Knight-Ridder and Times-Mirror, among others, lost tens of millions of dollars before bailing out (Moran, 1986). But as the decade rounded its midpoint, many of those publishers were opting to go online themselves. Their commitment ranged from assigning a copy editor or two to send the day's stories onto the Web, to hiring someone to handle online updates and maybe a few related links, to employing a small army of "digital journalists" to create interactive news and feature services that complemented rather than duplicated the print product (Harper, 1996a; Youngman, 1997).

It is too soon for much scholarly research into the working lives of these digital journalists to have appeared, but personal war stories and trade press coverage indicate a wide variation in accounts of everything from financial compensation to the degree of integration into the culture of the print newsroom. A few examples:

* At some newspapers, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, the print and online staffs are closely integrated; the *Journal* even reconfigured its newsroom to include the staffs of both products (Shaw, 1998). Uptown, at *The New York Times*, the staffs are housed not just in separate newsrooms but in separate buildings (Artley, 1997).

Where the staffs do work in relative proximity, that work does not always go smoothly. Although the industry has tried to stress the joys of integrating old and new methods and mind sets, to the benefit of both online and print products and staffers ("Opportunities in Anarchy," 1995), not everyone is convinced. "If you have full integration of online and [print] newspapers, it could be like the online bug integrating with the newspaper windshield, and I don't think it's going to be a healthy online business," says David Zeeck, executive editor in Tacoma, Wash. (Noack, 1998a, 41).

Other rumblings from within the newsroom reveal additional concerns. Journalists already cite the need to work "too many hours to get the job done" among their biggest frustrations (Voakes, 1997, 9); requests for any additional effort to bolster an online service that, in the words of one editor, "drains more energies, personnel, resources from our historical product" (Singer, 1997, 84) seem unlikely to be greeted with enthusiasm. The issue of workload has been an ongoing concern for the Newspaper Guild; grievances have been filed at several papers over jurisdiction of online staffers. Issues have included the language governing online workers, job titles and wage scales ("On-Line: Guild Work, Guild Jurisdiction" 1996).

* By some accounts, journalists with online skills are in the money, largely because software companies with deep pockets but little or no expertise in content production (read: Microsoft, whose "Sidewalk" city guides compete directly with online newspapers in a growing number of markets) are willing to pay them far more than newspapers do (Fitzgerald, 1997). "The best and the brightest have more options now, and the recruiting of journalism students is not being done only by newspapers but also by many other companies that are interested in people with strong communication skills," says Gannett's recruitment director. "The competition for the best is growing more intense" (Vovovich, 1997).

But other reports paint a different picture. Howard Witt, associate managing editor of the online *Chicago Tribune*, says he is trying to hire new journalism graduates who, it's true, may not otherwise have gotten a foot in the door at the *Trib* -- but primarily because "they're cheap, and I've got budgets to meet" (Witt, 1997). An informal poll of online editors by *Editor & Publisher* columnist Steve Outing (1996) two years ago indicated that salaries for non-management staffers at small and mid-sized papers were in the high teens and twenties, right in line with those of their print counterparts. And online start-up budgets under $5,000 have not been uncommon at smaller papers (Harper, 1996b).

* Although most experts advise those interested in working for online newspapers to concentrate on developing strong journalistic skills first (Outing, 1997a; "Guiding Principles," 1995), they also point to a somewhat different skills set for online staffers. Beyond the obvious need to understand how the technology works and what can be done with it (Lasica, 1997), emphasis has been placed on teamwork (Moeller, 1995), multimedia expertise (Harper, 1996a; Stepp, 1996), organizational skills (Meyer, 1997), and being "content providers" rather

than writers or editors (Shepard, 1997).

The differences in outlook may be creating tensions in newsrooms, along with a sense that the online staff is separate and, frankly, not quite equal (Noack, 1998a). Although online reporters remain few and far between, some say they have trouble getting access to sources that their print colleagues take for granted (Noack, 1998b; Quick, 1997). And the tensions may increase as online products draw fire for getting stories fast rather than right. "The technology of nonstop news and the Internet means that allegations that would have been carefully checked out a generation ago no longer are," *U.S. News and World Report* editor James Fallows declared (Vorman, 1998). Commentators around the country have echoed his concerns as online versions of such high-profile papers as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Dallas Morning News* have sought to outrace the 'Net's pseudonymous (and editorless) Matt Drudge for scoops, only to be forced into retractions hours later when the story proved bogus.

All these concerns, and others as well, raise a variety of issues for print and online managers. At its heart, the question is how to deal with change. Change is difficult for most institutions; it may be a particular challenge for the institution of the newspaper, whose culture, as journalism professor Jay Rosen (1997) points out, revolves around getting the day's edition out the door, leaving little time or inclination for asking such important questions as "What are we trying to accomplish here?" Change inevitably poses problems for newsroom managers, not the least of which are problems of perception; what the boss sees as opportunity, the employee often sees as disruption and intrusion (Weitzel and Kennedy, 1997).

Traditional newsroom management theories focus on motivation, leadership and job satisfaction (Giles, 1987; McClelland, 1984; Herzberg, 1976; Vroom and Deci, 1970). Although these concepts remain vital, insights into the nature of change and how to handle it also are needed. They can come from looking at the introduction of technology in a variety of workplaces, not just newsrooms, and from the perspective of a variety of business approaches (see Betz, 1998; Tushman and Anderson, 1997; Drucker, 1995), not just those taken by newspapers. Managers need to understand

> how, in general, changes in technology can affect the practice of management itself. Historically, technological change has always had an impact on management practice. Management practice is about how to plan, capitalize, organize, operate and control a business based on productive technologies. As productive technologies changed, new management challenges were created (Betz, 1998, 145).

Those involved in applying new technology must be flexible and agile; the organization itself also must be able to respond quickly to change (Betz, 1998). People in a traditional, hierarchical newspaper structure may find it especially hard to adjust physically or psychologically to this need.

The difficulty of adapting to technological change may be compounded in a culture whose members tend toward the technophobic. Editors' less-than-enthusiastic response to the introduction of pagination systems, which many perceived as taking time away from accuracy checks and writing improvements, has been well-documented; among the issues was the difficulty of incorporating a new technology without disrupting newsroom relationships and journalists' careers (Russial, 1994; Underwood et al., 1994; Stamm et al., 1995). The issues surrounding creation, maintenance and staffing of online products go far beyond changing a single newsroom tool. In effect, they involve launching whole new computer-based lines of business -- lines that, if they are to succeed, will require major commitments of personnel, money and attention from newsroom managers.

"It's scary to think about the monumental challenges facing the next generation of media managers. Not since the invention of the telegraph have there been more changes in gathering and dispersing information than there will be as the Internet becomes ubiquitous," one observer says. "All who live to see the first half of the 21st century will see changes brought about by the Internet comparable to those brought about by the invention and mass production of the automobile, the development of electricity and advent of widespread phone service in the early part of the 20th century. The people managing these changes will have their hands full" (Wilson, 1998, 56, 41).

This exploratory study seeks to provide figures that can lay the groundwork for dealing with those enormous challenges, both in today's newsrooms and in the academies charged with preparing that "next generation of media managers" for what lies ahead. It attempts to address some of the questions raised by conflicting reports. What are online staffers being paid? What are their backgrounds, and how much experience do they have? What sorts of jobs do they do? How integrated are online and print operations in U.S. newsrooms? And what sorts of issues are troubling managers **today** as they struggle to deal with rapid change and competitive pressures? It is hoped that the answers will be helpful in addressing the ongoing upheavals that tomorrow will surely bring.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on results of a mail survey of both online and print editors at all U.S. daily newspapers that had been online for at least six months at the time of the survey in early 1998. The six-month buffer allowed information to be collected from editors with experience in producing a daily online product under their belts.

The list of eligible newspapers was compiled in June 1997 from the *Editor & Publisher* online database, which included the name of an online contact person at each paper along with basic information about the publication. Although other lists of online papers exist, *E&P* has established itself as a standard reference source for information about the newspaper industry and so carries considerable credibility. Papers that publish fewer than five days a week, business publications and other special-interest papers on the *E&P* list were omitted in order to focus this study on general-interest dailies.

The list of online newspapers and their editors then served as the basis for generating a companion list of print newsroom executives at the same papers. The printed E&P *International Year Book* (1997) was used, along with a similar directory published by Bacon's Information (1997). Each editor on each list was assigned a code number so the researchers could track responses for follow-up mailings.

In January 1998, separate surveys were mailed to the online editor and to the executive or managing editor of the print product at 466 daily U.S. newspapers. The surveys asked basically the same questions, but the focus was on either the print or online operation. Eleven questions related to staffing issues, including staff size, salaries, benefits, experience levels and Newspaper Guild representation; these questions could be answered with a simple check mark or entry of a number (for instance, circulation size or salary range). Each survey also included three open-ended questions encouraging respondents to comment on critical concerns and management issues they faced. The surveys were color-coded to differentiate between print and online respondents and to facilitate data analysis.

In response to the first mailing, sent along with business reply envelopes coded to match the names on the list of editors, 132 completed surveys were returned. A reminder letter and duplicate survey were sent to non-respondents the second week of February 1998, resulting in 81 additional responses, for a total of 213 (107 print and 106 online). The overall response rate was 22.9 percent, a figure within the 10 to 50 percent range cited by Neuman (1991) as common in mail surveys. Responses were received from newspapers of all circulation sizes and from all parts of the country.

The Newspaper Association of America indicates that of 1,520 U.S. dailies in 1996 (the latest year for which figures are available), 1,289, or 84.8 percent, had circulations under 50,000 (see Chart 1, Figure 1). Another 8.3 percent (126) had circulations of 50,001 to 100,000, 4.2 percent (64) had circulations between 100,001 and 250,000 and 2.7 percent (41) had circulations over 250,000 (*Facts About Newspapers*, 1997).

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the circulations of the print versions of their newspapers; the responses were then placed into categories based on those used by the NAA. Although most of the responses came from smaller papers, they are less likely than the larger papers to be online (see Chart 1, Figure 2). Among the dailies with online products in June 1997, only 66.7 percent had circulations under 50,000. In contrast, 8 percent had circulations over 250,000 -- 39 of the 41 papers in that NAA category, in fact. Another 14.9 percent of the online papers were in the 50,001 to 100,000 category, and 10.4 percent had circulations between 100,001 and 250,000.

Survey responses corresponded more closely to the actual number of papers with online products than to the NAA baseline (see Chart 2, Figures 3 and 4). The numbers and approximate percentages of respondents by circulation category are:

- Under 50,000: 72 print (67.3 percent), 59 online (55.7 percent)
- 50,001 to 100,000: 13 print (12.1 percent), 24 online (22.6 percent)
- 100,001 to 250,000: 15 print (14 percent), 18 online (17 percent)
- Over 250,000: 7 print (6.5 percent), 5 online (4.7 percent)

In preparation for analyzing the data, variable names were assigned for each field in each of the quantitative-response questions. SPSS was then used to determine descriptive statistics for each variable. Once those data were identified, the circulation size variable was recoded to group respondents into the four NAA categories, to avoid the misleading conclusions that might result from directly comparing major metros to small community dailies. These then became the basis for subsequent analysis of both print and online data: Descriptive stats were obtained for all other variables based on circulation size.

For some questions -- particularly those relating to staff sizes, salaries and benefits -- it was necessary to separate data from online respondents who reported no overlap in staffs from those who shared staff members with the print newsroom. Otherwise, it would have been difficult to meaningfully compare and contrast the two in relation to those staffing issues.

Frequency and median were used as the primary statistics of interest in this preliminary pass through the data; median was chosen over mean because it is less susceptible to extremes. Follow-up analysis will allow extraction of more sophisticated correlations.

Responses to the open-ended questions were not statistically analyzed, but they were recorded and clustered into topics such as news content, staffing and revenue issues. All but a handful of editors offered comments, and many listed multiple management concerns. Online editors' written comments were particularly extensive and wide-ranging.

FINDINGS

Responses were received from editors at 184 different newspapers (for 29 papers, both the print and online editors responded), ranging in circulation size from 3,500 to more than 2 million. The median circulation size was about 35,500 for print respondents and 43,500 for online ones.

The findings are presented in three sections. The first and largest covers staffing issues, the primary focus of this study. The second summarizes findings related to content issues; the survey included two questions that sought to ascertain how much input online staffers had into the actual online content (as opposed to simply the display format). The final section discusses responses to the open-ended questions about management issues.

Again, additional correlations remain to be mined from this study. Follow-up analysis will explore in greater breadth and depth.

FINDINGS: STAFFING

The survey asked both print and online respondents to describe staff sizes, salaries, benefits and experience levels. Responses from print editors were used primarily as a yardstick against which to measure those from online editors.

Among the 184 different newspapers whose editors responded to the survey, 80 (43.5 percent) said the print and online newsrooms were staffed completely separately, with no overlap in personnel. All the papers with circulations over 250,000 had separate print and online staffs. In contrast, only 23.9 percent of the under-50,000 papers said their staffs did not overlap. "No one is online-only," wrote an online editor at a 26,000-circulation daily. "Some desk people code up stories, and photographers do some photos each night. Everyone is part of the newsroom's regular staff. This is just one of their duties." In general, these preliminary findings indicate that the larger the paper, the more likely it is to staff its two products independently; 58.8 percent of the 50,001- to 100,000-circulation papers reported separate staffs, as did 78.6 percent in the 100,001- to 250,000-circulation category.

Copy editors were among the staffers most likely to split print and online duties; 28 respondents said they shared copy editors. People with visual communication skills also do double duty; nine online editors said they shared layout and design staff with the print side, and eight shared one or more staffers identified as a graphic editor, graphic artist or photographer. Fourteen respondents shared reporters or writers. Other shared jobs included assigning or section editors, clerks and typists, systems managers, and advertising reps. Some respondents clearly felt themselves to be jacks-of-all-trades. "I do all these things -- paginator, interim entertainment editor, computer guy and telephone guy," one online editor wrote.

Online staff size also increased with circulation size, but with considerable variation, especially among the larger papers. Of particular interest was the number of full-time, permanent online employees -- in other words, regular hires. One paper in the largest circulation category had 55 such people working on its online staff, plus another 250 stringers. But another paper in the same circulation category had only three full-time, permanent online staffers. Three papers of between 100,001 and 250,000 circulation had a lone permanent full-timer producing their online product; the largest online staff in that circulation category consisted of 24 permanent, full-time employees.

Smaller papers had smaller staffs. Sixteen of the 59 online editors at papers below 50,000 circulation said they had no permanent full-time staff at all; another 13 said they had one staffer. So among the smallest papers, half were producing and maintaining an online product with a two-person team at best. On the high end, the under-50,000 category topped out at five full-time, permanent employees, and the next-largest group had a maximum of nine. Median sizes of full-time, permanent staffs, from smallest to largest circulation category, were one, three, five and 34.

Although the use of contractors or consultants appears relatively rare, some reliance on online part-time or temporary employees was apparent among papers in all circulation categories. Numbers ranged from one or two part-time employees at the smaller papers to, again, those 250 stringers at the largest of the survey respondents.

Print staff sizes were larger. The smallest print newsroom reported four full-time, permanent employees; the largest had more than 500. Median staff sizes by circulation category were 23 (under 50,000), 68 (50,0001 to 100,000), 198.5 (100,001 to 250,000) and 350 (over 250,00). These figures compare favorably with those from the NAA; in 1996, according to an informal and unscientific *Presstime* poll of newspaper editors, staff sizes ranged from five to 78 for the smallest papers; 32 to 143 for those in the 50,001 to 100,000 range; 120 to 296 for those from 100,001 to 250,000 circulation; and 247 to 356 for the largest papers (Wasser, 1996). Medians were not reported.

Print newsrooms also tended to be staffed mainly with full-time permanent employees; however, more than two-thirds of the print editors did say they employed at least one part-timer. Contractors or consultants worked part-time in 16 newsrooms and full-time in six.

The survey provided a wealth of information about salary ranges, with variations across both job and circulation categories. As mentioned, a number of people with visual communication skills shared their expertise between the print and online products. But salaries of designers, artists and photographers who worked **solely** for the online product tended to be lower than those of their print-only counterparts at small papers -- and higher at large ones. Online-only designers earn anywhere from $11,520 at one of the smallest papers to $82,000 at one of the biggest. The medians for lowest- and highest-paid online designers per circulation category are $16,640 and $25,000 (under 50,000), $26,000 and $35,000 (50,001 to 100,000), $30,000 and $43,500 (100,001 to 250,000) and $45,000 and $82,000 (over $250,000) (see Chart 2, Figure 1). Salaries for online graphic artists and photographers exhibit less variation: $16,000 at the low end up to a maximum of $44,000.

Salaries for designers on the print side start at $15,360 and range up to a high of $87,000. The medians, again for lowest- and highest-paid designers per circulation category, are $22,000 and $29,500 (under 50,000), $26,000 and $40,000 (50,001 to 100,000), $25,400 and $49,800 (100,001 to 250,000) and $40,800 and $58,272 (over 250,000). Salaries for print graphic artists and photographers ranged from a low of $11,520 to a high of $90,000.

Online-only copy editors start at $18,000 and range up to $41,280, with overall medians of $32,500 for the lowest-paid and $39,000 for the highest-paid. The range among print copy editors is much greater, from $11,520 up to $80,000. At all but the smallest papers (where the print and online staffs tend to overlap), the lowest-paid online copy editor makes more than his or her lowest-paid print counterpart. But the reverse is true for the highest-paid copy editors, among whom those on the print side make more. To take an example from the 100,001 to 250,000 circulation category, the lowest-paid online copy editors earn a median salary of $31,500; the lowest-paid print copy editors earn a median of only $25,300. But the highest-paid online copy editors make a median salary of $37,500, compared with a median of $47,040 for their highest-paid print counterparts (see Chart 2, Figure 2).

Too few newspapers in the survey have online reporters to allow meaningful comparisons with print reporters. None of the newspapers with circulations under 50,000 had any online-only reporters; only one paper in the next-largest category had an online-only reporter, who earned $45,000. In the 100,001- to 250,000-circulation category, one paper had at least two reporters, whose salaries ranged from $28,000 to $38,000. Among the largest papers, two listed reporters' salaries, ranging from $25,520 to $45,000.

Print reporters' salaries run the gamut, starting at $11,520 and going up to $100,000. The overall median salaries for reporters among the print respondents' newsrooms ranged from $20,000 for the lowest-paid to $30,000 for the highest-paid; however, the median for top-earning reporters at the larger papers was a respectable $80,000.

These print salary figures hold up alongside findings of other researchers. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) found that among all editorial staffers in 1991, the median daily newspaper salary was $35,180. In 1996, new graduates got paid a median of $20,800 to start at daily papers (Kosicki and Becker, 1997). At small papers, starting salaries for reporters averaged $16,564 in 1996, while starting editors averaged just over $19,000; among papers covered by the Newspaper Guild, reporters and photographers averaged $24,833 to start as of April 1997

(Kodrich, 1997). And a Freedom Forum study that also looked at new hires found that about 58 percent of all new journalists (in all media) earned less than $30,000 a year (Medsger, 1996). These salaries mean journalists are, in general, the lowest-paid of any college-educated people entering the work force (ibid.), a state of affairs that one group of researchers attributes to the law of supply and demand: in 1990-91, for instance, there were 4.18 journalism graduates seeking every one available newspaper job (Becker et al., 1996).

At the management level, the present survey found that online managers start off in the same ballpark as their print counterparts, but the salary ceiling is lower. Online managers' salaries ranged from $20,000 at a small paper to $90,000 at a larger one; on the print side, management salaries started at $19,000 but topped out at more than $150,000. As might be expected, there were major differences by circulation size (see Chart 2, Figure 3). The median salaries for lowest- and highest-paid online-only managers by paper size were $31,000 and $35,000 (under 50,000), $34,700 and $39,000 (50,001 to 100,000), $55,000 and $70,000 (100,001 to 250,000) and $72,000 and $76,000 (over 250,000). (By the way, among network managers responding to an *InternetWeek* survey in the fall of 1997, the **average** salary was $73,593, and about a third of the respondents earned over $75,000 a year [Mulqueen, 1997]. Even the highest-paid online newspaper managers barely stack up.)

Print managers at larger newspapers, in particular, fare better. The median salaries for lowest- and highest-paid print managers at papers with circulations over 250,000 are $80,000 and $99,360, respectively. Medians for the other circulation categories are $38,200 and $44,000 (under 50,000), $45,700 and $78,979 (50,001 to 100,000) and $49,500 and $93,000 (100,001 to 250,000). These figures are roughly in line with a 1997 Newspaper Industry Compensation Survey, which reported a $71,000 median salary for newspaper editors across all circulation categories (Kodrich, 1997).

This salary discrepancy may be explained by the fact that many top online editors are both less experienced and lower in the paper's hierarchy than top print editors (see Chart 3). Online managers had an overall median of about 13.5 years of experience; print managers had an overall median of 21 years of experience.

Respondents also were asked the titles of the person to whom they reported and of the person to whom their counterpart reported. Of the total of 106 online editors who responded, 60 said their print counterparts reported directly to the publisher or CEO. However, only 33 did so themselves. Another three online editors reported directly to a corporate owner or president, and five said the print editor did. Seventeen online editors reported to the paper's managing editor, seven to the editor and five to the executive editor.

A number of online editors seemed removed from the editorial chain of command entirely, reporting either to a lower-level corporate officer or, not uncommonly, to someone in marketing: a marketing or advertising director, vice president of market development, promotions manager and so on. Two reported to a production chief; another, whose print counterpart answered to the publisher, reported to a "quality control coordinator." In light of the concerns about the online product's profitability previously described, it is worth noting that two of the online editors reported directly to the newspaper's controller. Needless to say, none of the print editors did.

Another goal of this survey was to determine the experience levels of online staffs compared with those on the print side. As discussed above, some trade press articles have indicated that new or recent college graduates may have an easier time finding a job, particularly at larger newspapers, if they are able to do online work. Respondents were asked how many of their new hires in the past three years were right out of school and how many had previous professional experience.

The 50 online respondents with totally separate staffs hired a total of 135 people over the past three years (see Chart 4, Figure 1). Eighteen of these papers reported hiring someone straight from school. One editor for an 180,000-circulation paper said "many" new grads were hired but did not offer a number. Forty-four online staffers were hired right from school by papers that did provide specific numbers; more than a third of those, or 16 new grads, went to work for one of eight separately staffed papers with circulations under 50,000. Four papers in the 50,001 to 100,000 category hired one new grad apiece. Another four in the 100,001 to 250,000 range hired a total of eight new grads, and two with circulations over 250,000 hired 16 people right out of school. However, 15 of those 16 were hired by a single large paper.

The 107 print respondents had hired 1,305 people in the past three years; 73 papers, or about 68.2 percent, had hired at least one staffer right out of school (see Chart 4, Figure 2). A total of 289 new graduates went to work for one of these papers. About 60 percent of those, or 173 new graduates, were hired by papers with circulations under 50,000. Another 56 new grads (19.4 percent) went to work for papers with circulations of 50,001 to 100,000. Papers in the two largest circulation categories each hired 30 new grads, or just over 10 percent apiece of the total number of hires right out of school. (Unfortunately, the print editor at the paper that hired 15 online people fresh from school did not respond to the survey.)

Respondents also were asked to indicate where new hires came from if they **did** have previous professional experience. Twenty-two of the online hires had experience at other newspapers; of those, 15 went to work at papers with circulations over 100,000. However, 69 online hires -- 51.1 percent of the total 135 online hires -- came from other media, such as television, or other fields, from computer programming to free-lance illustration.

Print editors reported hiring 934 people from other newspapers over the past three years; of those, 526 went to papers with circulations over 100,000. Only 82 print hires, a mere 6.3 percent of the total 1,305 new employees, were from other media or other fields.

To summarize the findings about hiring: In all, the 50 online-only editors reported hiring a total of 135 people over the past three years, of whom 44 -- about a third -- were right out of school. But 51 percent had experience in fields or media other than newspapers, indicating skills in telling a story in multiple ways may indeed be deemed valuable online.

The 107 print respondents hired 1,305 people in the same time period, of whom roughly 22 percent were new graduates and about 6 percent were from other fields or other media. In other words, more than seven of every 10 new print hires over the past three years had prior newspaper experience. Although it is dangerous to compare such wildly different numbers, it does appear that new college graduates may have better odds of employment on the online side. On the other hand, many more print jobs have been available. Obviously, as more papers go online, more opportunities should open up.

Survey respondents also were asked about benefits and union representation. No respondents with separate online staffs said their employees were denied medical insurance. Other benefits were not universal. Only 12 of the 50 offered child care benefits. Other benefits included in the survey were paid sick leave (which only one paper said it does not provide its online employees), participation in a company retirement plan (not provided by two papers), life insurance (not provided by seven), disability insurance (not provided by nine) and maternity benefits (not provided by 12).

The story was not all that different on the print side. All 107 print respondents provided medical insurance, but only 20 offered child care benefits. Among other benefits, 94.4 percent of the 107 respondents provided paid sick leave; 90.7 percent offered participation in a company retirement plan; another 90.7 percent provided life insurance; 78.5 percent provided disability coverage; and 61.7 percent offered maternity benefits.

There appears, then, to be little distinction between full-time online and print employees in terms of their eligibility for company benefits. The somewhat higher percentages among the online respondents may be attributable to the fact that a greater percentage of them work for larger papers, which are more likely to offer a comprehensive benefits package. Follow-up data analysis will attempt to determine whether that is indeed the case.

The number of respondents whose staffs are covered by the Newspaper Guild was quite small. Among all 106 online respondents, only four worked in closed shops (employees are required to join) and another three in open shops (employees may choose to join); 93 said staffers were not Guild members, and six declined to answer the question. Among the seven whose staffers **were** either Guild members or Guild-eligible, five said the union had raised concerns about online staffers. Those concerns included the job classifications of online employees (five respondents); the need for contract renegotiation to include online employees (four respondents); print newsroom employees doing work for the online product (three respondents); the use of either part-timers or outside employees (two respondents); and the benefits available to and salaries of online employees (one respondent apiece).

The findings were comparable in the print newsrooms; 91 of the 106 print editors who answered the question said their staffers were not members of the Guild. Among the 15 who said their papers did have Guild representation, 12 said the union had expressed concerns about the online product. However, just three of the print editors indicated what those concerns were, too few to draw any conclusions about key union issues.

In general, responses about the Newspaper Guild are too few to risk more than tentative speculation about their implications. But what little information is available does suggest the Guild is aware of the changes under way in the newsroom and is at least inquiring into issues of workload and equity between print and online staffs.

FINDINGS: CONTENT

Survey respondents were asked two questions related to the nature of the online product. Although it was not the primary goal of this study to delve into content issues, the questions are relevant because they relate to the degree to which online staffs are creating unique content or modifying material provided by the print side.

As mentioned, for 29 papers, both the print and online editors responded to the survey. In order to avoid counting any paper twice, the duplicate print editors' responses to these content questions were discarded, leaving an "n" of 184 respondents. Of these, half said the online staff created unique materials. The most common were discussion or chat areas; of the 92 editors whose paper offered unique online content, 65 (70.7 percent) cited these. Other widespread types of unique content were special packages or sections (63 respondents, or 68.5 percent) and entertainment such as polls, games or quizzes (57 respondents, or 62 percent). Only 26 respondents, or 28.3 percent, said original stories were available online.

Larger papers are more likely to provide original content online. Among the smallest papers, 35.8 percent produced unique material. The percentages increased with circulation size: 64.7 percent of those in the 50,001 to 100,000 category offered original items, as did 71.4 percent in the third-largest group and 91.7 percent -- all but one paper -- in the 250,000-plus category. Discussion or chat areas were most common across the board, but the larger papers were far more likely than the smaller ones to offer original stories; 41.7 percent of the papers larger than 250,000 did so, compared with just 8.3 percent of those under 50,000.

Papers with separate online staffs -- which included all the largest ones -- were much more apt to produce unique online content. Among online respondents with separate staffs, 82 percent created original material, compared with just over a third of those with shared staffs.

Another content-oriented question asked whether material from the print paper is changed before appearing online. Again, the results were fairly evenly divided, with about 45.9 percent of the respondents saying it was changed and 49.2 percent saying it wasn't (nine people didn't answer the question). Those with separate online staffs were twice as likely as those with shared staffs to make changes; 70 percent of the papers with separate staffs reported changing print copy, compared with only a third of the papers with shared staffs.

Smaller newspapers were somewhat hesitant to make changes; 52.5 percent of the respondents from papers under 50,000 said they did not change print content. However, changes were more likely at papers in the middle two categories than in the largest one. Only half of the 12 respondents from papers with circulations over 250,000 reported content changes, compared with 64.3 percent of the respondents from 100,001- to 250,000-circulation papers and 67.6 percent of those from papers in the 50,001 to 100,000 category. Follow-up investigation is needed to ascertain why this might be so.

When the print product **is** changed, what sorts of changes are made? Hypertext links are the most common additions; 84.5 percent of the respondents who reported any changes cited these. About two-thirds of these respondents changed headlines -- not surprising, given the different formats and layouts of the two products. Other changes included photos or artwork (50 percent), structural modifications (29.7 percent) and wording (21.4 percent). Other unspecified features were indicated by 64.3 percent of the respondents; although they did not say what these were, the survey suggested polls or e-mail addresses as examples.

FINDINGS: OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

In addition to the questions discussed above, two open-ended questions were posed to both print and online editors. Both also were given space to provide additional comments on any topic they wished. Few print editors added such comments; the comments offered by 26 online editors served primarily to clarify the way they operated or their specific problems. In the interests of space, this section will concentrate on responses to the two directed questions.

Print managers' most critical concerns in directing their staffs fell into two main categories: news content (46 comments) and staffing (28 comments). Only four mentioned money or resources; another eight had miscellaneous comments. Accuracy and news quality accounted for 22 content-oriented comments. Fourteen print editors mentioned serving local readers; others discussed productivity, deadlines or staff motivation. For example, one editor expressed concerns about "maintaining [a] level of excellence in writing, photography, design, copy editing, reporting, and managers who manage for performance." Another wanted the staff "to produce a newspaper that is accurate, fair, informative, useful, fun, easy to read and relevant." A third stressed "making sure we are publishing a relevant, hard-hitting newspaper."

Staffing comments tended to be pragmatic. Most were concerned about finding, hiring and keeping qualified people. Only four editors mentioned pay specifically although that concern may be partially contained in comments about high turnover and attracting staff. In general, competition from other papers, efforts to keep good people and staff shortages were major issues. Some print editors focused on training newcomers, motivating them to do their best and dealing with the life styles of young people not in love with long, late or irregular hours. "It's like herding cats," said one. "This is a very hard group to convert to teamwork and to teach to think critically and strategically."

Print editors gave briefer responses to a question that asked what management issues they faced that **differ** from those online managers face. Many see their job as harder and as more constrained by space and deadlines. "We must be the starting point for all news," said one print editor. "We are not a niche offering but a full-service provider. Also, literary quality counts. And we must get it right the first time. Online managers can dribble out stories and update constantly. Online is more like radio news, repackaging the work of others and ignore

[sic] the non-sexy stuff." One editor said the online world was more exciting and challenging while another seemed to think the online side would be less stimulating: "Print journalists tend to be creative vs. online journalists whose interests and expertise if often more technical." At least one print editor was sympathetic to the challenges faced by online colleagues: "We [print editors] don't have to continually justify our existence! Our news director needs to always be on top of new developments. It is not as critical for us on the print side."

Online editors' responses produced both more comments and more worries. Twenty-eight online editors cited staffing as an issue, but their concern was with finding and keeping multi-talented staffers who understand both technology and journalism so they won't, as one editor said, "leave for greener pastures." Seven who offered comments in response to this question simply had no staff at the time the survey was conducted. Several cited the problems of functioning with only a one- or two-person staff, resulting in burnout and long hours. Online journalists may be the 1990s version of the Renaissance man (Sill, 1995), but the role can be more exhausting than exhilarating for those who take it on.

Two areas not even mentioned by print editors that came out in online editors' comments were profits and the relationship between the two staffs. While print editors wished they could pay their staffs more, online editors were concerned with their **product** making money. Seventeen commented on the Web site as a money-maker; topics ranged from creating a viable business plan to translating site popularity into revenue. No print editors mentioned the need for the paper to make a profit; they just wanted more money so they could spend it.

The relationship between the two units also bothered online editors, 19 of whom mentioned problems with, as one put it, "getting the respect and attention of our print counterparts." Another said "a buy-in from rest of [the] newspaper departments" was key. A third wished for "getting print journalists to take it seriously." Another said the biggest management problem was keeping the staff "feeling as if they are a valued part of the 'mother ship' since so much effort must of necessity be put into the newspaper and so little emphasis is placed on the Web site."

Time and space were problems for 12 online editors, whose comments can be summed up by this remark: "So much to post, so little time to do it."

Content was the main concern of nine online editors, who worried mainly about being able to accomplish the work at all. Few were as idealistic as their print counterparts although one expressed desires for "making the web site as credible as the newspaper, making it as valuable without being the same, and making it profitable."

In response to the question about how their issues differed from those of their print counterparts, 21 online editors cited the constantly changing technology and the need to keep on top of it while juggling multiple tasks and 24-hour deadlines. One harried online editor wrote: "I am the promotions and marketing and advertising person as well as directing the staff and running the department. I wear several different hats that are assumed by different individuals in the news and advertising and business departments."

Online editors also had a different take on content issues. While accurate, fair local news was a main concern for print editors, online editors pointed out they had a non-traditional, new audience to capture and hold. They also had a totally different sort of space problem than their print counterparts: Instead of being at a premium, online space is limitless. That's not so wonderful when you have to constantly deal with how to prioritize content, one online editor said. Some online editors also worried that the line between editorial and advertising content is more often blurred online, an issue highlighted recently in the trade press (Blumenthal, 1997; Tucher, 1997) and, of course, supported by the fact that at many papers, the online product is under the marketing department's auspices.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this survey offer mixed support for anecdotal accounts of online newsroom work provided by the trade journals. Reports of significantly higher salaries for online newspaper journalists may largely be wishful thinking. There were variations by both job and circulation classifications, so conclusive statements on the basis of this preliminary analysis would be dangerous. However, if people with online expertise are indeed walking right into high-paying jobs, this study would indicate they're probably not going to work for newspapers. At all but the largest papers, online designers' salaries seem to top out in the low 40s, and copy editors are doing well if they take home a salary in the high 30s.

Although some online managers seem on a par with their print counterparts, many make lower salaries and are at a lower level in the overall newspaper hierarchy. The number of online editors saying they report to people outside the editorial chain of command -- from advertising directors to production managers -- lends support to the suggestion that newspaper journalists may perceive the online service itself as something less than the purely editorial product turned out by the print newsroom. This perception is poignantly reflected in the online editors' open-ended comments, in which they express concerns about their inability to get the print side to take them seriously, their desire to make their own staffs feel important, and their unique emphasis on both credibility and profitability.

This study does tentatively support the suggestion that new college graduates may have a leg up in finding a job if they are able and willing to work on the online product. About a third of the editors with separate online staffs said they had hired people right out of school, compared with only 22 percent of the print editors. However, the total number of online hires remains small. Indeed, most online staffs today are tiny; a staff of three or four people is typical -- and one or two far from uncommon -- for small and mid-sized papers.

Fairly strong support for reports and advice in the trade press comes from the number of online staffers hired from jobs outside the newspaper industry. While print editors hired fewer than 7 percent of their employees from other media or other fields, more than half of the online editors brought in people with experience in everything from broadcast media to software development; one online editor even reported hiring someone with a background in philosophy. (A reward surely awaits that editor somewhere!) These findings indicate that multimedia skills and an understanding of the capabilities of computer technology are indeed valuable in online newsrooms and may be given greater weight than newspaper experience. Perhaps online media do offer an escape from the Catch-22 situation faced by young journalists for decades: not being able to get a newspaper job until they've already had one.

In terms of benefits, online and print staffers seem to receive comparable treatment: If they are regular employees, they appear to be eligible for whatever benefits the company offers. Although very few respondents said their staffers were members of the Newspaper Guild, those whose employees did have Guild representation indicated the union has expressed a number of concerns about online staffing, notably related to workload and equity issues.

It was not the primary goal of this study to examine online content issues, but the results do suggest that about half the online staffs are adding new content rather than simply providing digital "shovelware," stories taken from the print version and shoveled online unchanged. The most common additions involved interactivity, such as discussion forums. Larger papers and papers with separate online staffs were considerably more likely than smaller ones to either modify print stories or offer unique content.

Perhaps the starkest confirmation of trade press reports, however, came from online editors' responses to the survey's open-ended questions. These editors seem to have taken publishers' concerns about making money to heart, with 17 of the respondents expressing worries about the online product's profitability -- something not one print editor even mentioned. Online editors also were troubled by the nonstop demands of ever-changing technology, requiring the completion of multiple complex tasks by small (or, for some, non-existent) staffs who must put in long and frustrating hours. Many of their comments also reflect a growing bitterness caused by their isolation from print colleagues who may tend to accord the online staff and product neither respect nor even attention.

It is worth repeating that this exploratory paper reports only a preliminary run through the data. Much statistical analysis remains to be done to extract deeper levels of meaning from the survey results highlighted here. But even this initial pass may be helpful to educators seeking to advise students about and adapt curricula to the as-yet-little-understood needs of online media, as well as to newspaper executives seeking to balance the desire to take advantage of the new medium with the desire not to lose a fortune in the process.

For educators, this survey indicates a market today for people with online skills and interests. Such people can command wages that, while far from princely, are at least in line with those offered to their counterparts on the print side. As competition from outside the newspaper industry increases, salaries may also rise, particularly if the suggestion that an oversupply of journalism graduates keeps wages low (Becker et al., 1996) is true.

Among traditional print skills, editors and designers currently are in greater demand online than reporters. But the indication that online editors are open to the idea of hiring people without newspaper backgrounds suggests educators would do well to enable and encourage students to develop a range of story-telling skills -- a multimedia mix that may not be well-suited to the medium-specific sequences of most journalism schools today. In general, barring the unlikely event of a staffing frenzy over the next few months, 1998 graduates who do land online jobs with newspapers can expect long hours and, perhaps, some feelings of alienation from their counterparts in print. Like the publishers at the other end of the newspaper hierarchy, new hires must be willing to gamble that the payout in the long run will make the struggle in these early years worthwhile.

For newspaper executives, the frustrations expressed by online editors clearly indicate that publishers' deep ambiguity about the Web is putting considerable pressure on the people they are asking to tackle the job. Both the closed- and open-ended survey results indicate staff sizes are too small to adequately support a quality online product, even without the compounding difficulties of fast-paced technological change. The fact that more than half the online editors reported sharing staffs with the print side foreshadows ongoing confrontations over workload, especially if the online product continues to be viewed as less important than the print one.

Indeed, the perception among online editors that they and their staffs are seen as second-class citizens demands immediate management attention before the challenge and excitement of doing something new devolves into a routine of overwork laced with bitterness and, before long, burnout. In addition, if demand for "content providers" with multimedia design and writing skills continues to grow outside the traditional media, publishers would do well to consider raising salary levels. Otherwise, the skilled people they need to create and maintain a quality online product will simply go elsewhere.

To do something well takes commitment: of money, of time, of effort, of faith. If publishers are willing to give their online products a fair shot at success, they may achieve it. If they hobble those products financially or psychologically, the odds become much longer.

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Chart No. 1

Figure 1
U.S. Dailies by Circulation Percentage

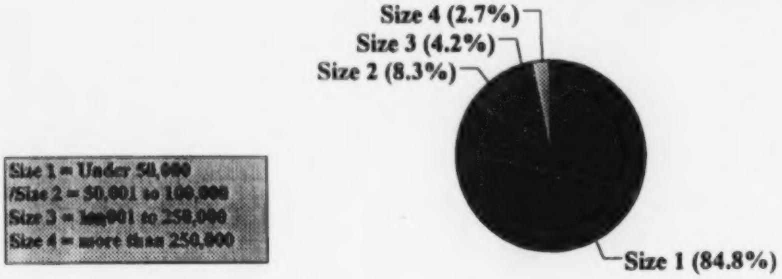


Figure 2
Surveyed Papers by Circulation Groups

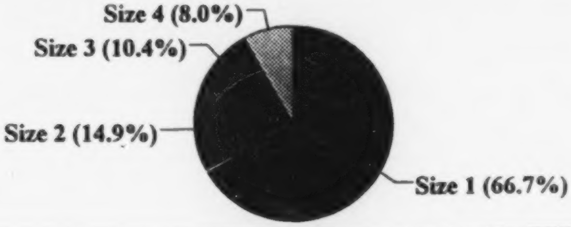
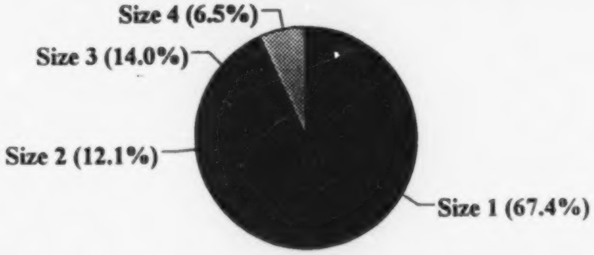


Figure No. 3
Print Newspaper Responses



Online Newspaper Responses

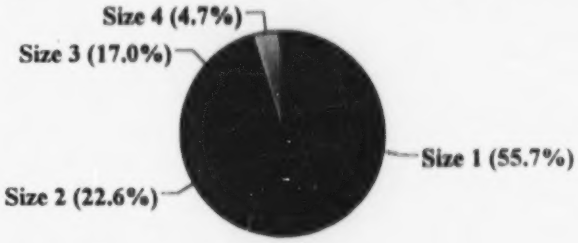


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Chart [illegible] — Median Salaries

Figure 1

Designers' Salaries - Online and Print

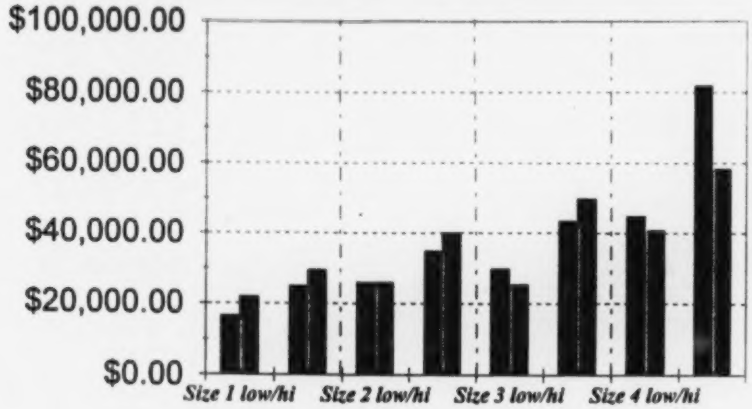


Figure 2

Copy Editors' Salaries - Online, Print

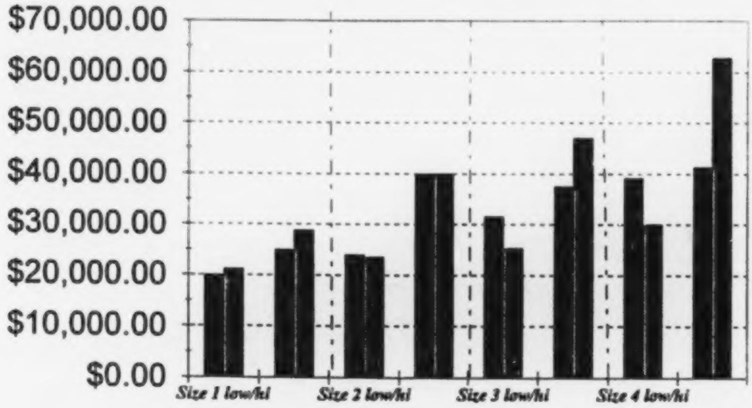
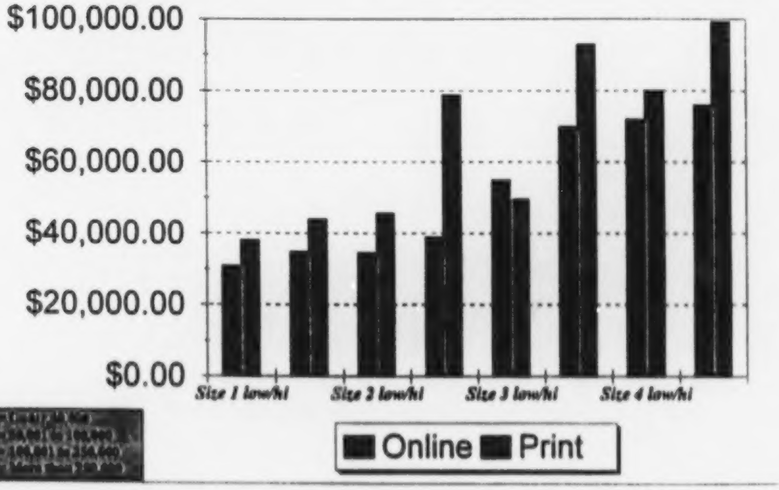


Figure 3

Managers' Salaries - Online and Print



[illegible]

Chart No. 3

Years of Experience

Online, Print Managers Compared

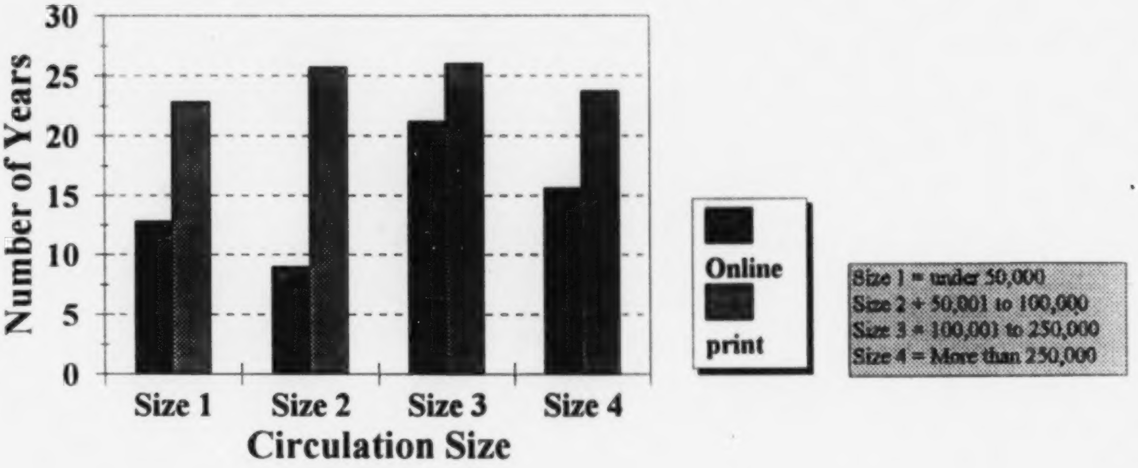


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Chart No. 4

Figure 1

Separate Online Staff New Hires

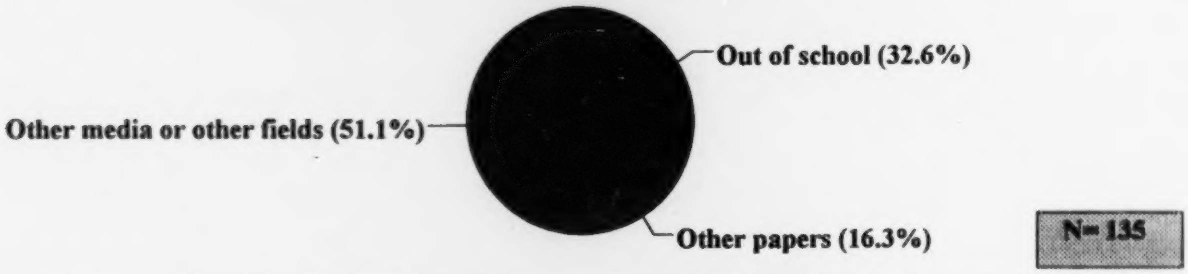
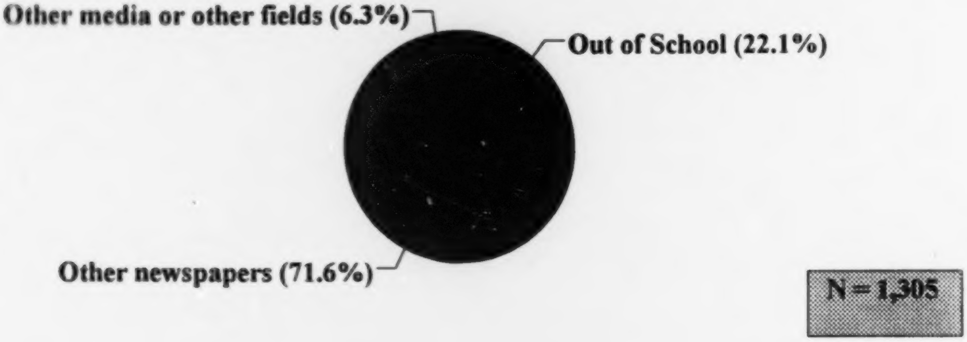


Figure 2

Print New Hires



50 years later: "What it means to miss the paper"

Berelson, dependency theory and failed newspaper delivery

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Abstract

This study revisits a landmark investigation of newspaper readership published 50 years ago. Like the work of Bernard Berelson, it attempts to discover why regular newspaper readers "miss" their paper when they cannot receive it. This study uses individual stoppages caused by normal delivery problems at a daily newspaper in lieu of the strike originally studied. The study reviews the research on readership since the original project and suggests linkages to the media dependency theory.

50 years later: "What it means to miss the paper"

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Communications researchers have long argued about the effects of media, the ethics of their production and use, and the validity or dangers of their content. But the question of just why, socially, emotionally and culturally, the media often play a critical part in our lives continually dives in and out of the mainstream of communications research. This is a reexamination of one of the earliest of the research projects that ventured into the user's personal attachment to the media.

In the 1948-49 edition of *Communication Research*, Bernard Berelson of Columbia University published a study that was cited in textbooks and other research papers for the next five decades. "What 'Missing the Newspaper' Means" was an analysis of the 1945 New York newspaper delivery strike through the eyes of the would-be readers who didn't get their usual daily paper. Berelson was not alone in researching the impact of the strike. He refers to two other research projects in his explanation of why he conducted his own study. Other research groups conducted surveys to tally the methods people used to keep up with the news while the strike was on, what parts of the paper they missed most and to what degree their pining for the newspaper increased as the strike continued (Berelson, 1949, Pages 111-112).

But Berelson had an educated hunch that "missing the newspaper" was less a statement of physical loss than it was of social and psychological trauma. He wanted to know what people felt when the paper didn't arrive, and why.

This study, like Berelson's, employs the folk axiom "absence makes the heart grow fonder" in examining why people read a newspaper. More specifically, it lets people who have been denied their regular daily newspaper explain the societal and personal values that make this common medium important to their lives. As a full blackout of newspapers is now unlikely, even in the event of a strike (suburban papers, national papers and television fill the gap), this project sought another avenue to the "missing the paper" syndrome. That avenue was found in the daily list of "miss" complaints to a newspaper by subscribers who had not received their paper. By contacting these complainants shortly after they called the publishing company, the researcher hoped to capture the same mood and crisis-enhanced articulation that Berelson found with his strike-deprived readers.

Like Berelson, this study uses a series of intensive interviews with people who normally read a newspaper every day, but suddenly did not get their daily dose of the news. It also uses Berelson's formula of structured questions to spark explanatory conversation, then grounded theory for analysis of the comments and historical comparison with the literature in an attempt to determine "what missing the newspaper" really means.

Berelson's face-value research question was "what does it mean when people say they 'miss the newspaper'?" Embedded in this is the more direct question of "why do people read the newspaper?" Researchers have addressed that last question for at least a half century, with no conclusive answer. The intent of this study, then, is to echo Berelson and turn the question back to the reader: Can newspaper readers articulate why they feel a need to read?

Review of the Literature

Berelson conducted his study at a time when the scholars of a rapidly modernizing western society were grappling with what to make of mass media. John J. Pauly paints a fascinating picture of this period in "Interesting the Public: A Brief History of the Newsreading Movement" (1991). A major train of thought at this time, Pauly says, concentrated on the role and responsibility of readers in democratic societies. He quoted journalism professor Raymond Nixon as declaring in 1933 "The greatest danger to society is not the way papers are edited but in the way papers are read" (Pauly, 1991, Page 286). Pauly also noted a public effort prior to World War II to instill Americans with the newsreading habit. Programs were instituted to tutor readers in higher tastes and in techniques of systematic, critical reading. "Educators, journalists, and public officials alike wanted citizens to read more critically, but also more faithfully, in a spirit of civic duty" (Pauly, 1991, Page 290).

Even more contemporary to Berelson was Edgar Dale's textbook, *How to Read a Newspaper* (1941). Pauly said the book was widely adopted by American high schools and had the premise that one must regularly read a newspaper to be a responsible member of democratic society. The newsreading "habit" that Berelson found in his subjects, then, had a societal basis in addition to a personal preference basis. The effort to encourage reading continues today through two privately sponsored programs, Reading is Fundamental and Newspapers in Education. The latter, sponsored by the Newspaper Association of America, places newspapers in classrooms as teaching aids.

Barnhurst and Wartella (1991) provide evidence of how extensively the media landscape has changed since Berelson's day. They cite a number of studies showing the decline of newspaper readership, noting especially that in 1970 newspaper circulation fell below the number of households in the nation for the first time this century. Their study of undergraduate college students showed that television is now a major factor in the lives of Americans, with respondents spending three times as much time daily watching television than reading the newspaper (Barnhurst and Wartella, 1991, Page 196). Nevertheless, this study of the progeny of the television age showed a lingering appreciation for newspapers. The researchers used a qualitative method not dissimilar to Berelson, asking high school students to write life histories of their media experience. Although most initially denied much contact with papers, nearly half the students studied by Barnhurst and Wartella eventually said the newspaper was a constant part of the household background. It was read, but also performed a variety of non-news functions for these families – a source of art projects, a focus for family time, an object of entertainment, a patching material for shoes with holes and a cudgel for hitting the dog.

As they entered adulthood, many of these young people formed strong opinions about the value of newspaper reading. Their essays often associated "quality" or "education" with newspaper reading: "It sounds a bit strange, but I think of an elite group when I picture someone reading a newspaper. I feel that more educated people read papers while the less educated just sit back and watch the news on television" (Barnhurst and Wartella, 1991, Page 203). Like Berelson's study, then, the work of Barnhurst and Wartella shows that newspaper use sometime seems to defy logical explanation.

Uses and gratification research evolved to address that concern – though certainly not just with newspapers. Much of the early uses and gratification work of the 1940s focused on the audiences of radio soap operas. Though it has been applied to almost every medium since, it has emphasized the entertainment aspect of mass media (O'Sullivan et al,1994). This field of study theorizes that the consumption of media output is motivated by the gratification of certain individually experienced needs of audience members, rather than the strength of the media themselves. It was a break from the concentration on media effects of the 1930s and 1940s. As

Halloran (1970), said, it diverted researchers from the habit of thinking of what media do *to* people. Instead, it directed them to look at what people do *with* the media.

Much of uses and gratification study tries to quantify media use by how it fills four needs: Diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance (McQuail, 1972). Although less specific, these categories roughly follow Berelson's five-point typology: Information about public affairs (surveillance), tools for daily living (personal identity and perhaps diversion), respite (diversion), social prestige (personal relationships), and social contact (personal relationships and personal identity). Later uses and gratification studies used much longer lists of gratifications sought, often specific to a medium or audience setting. The 12 factors Dobos (1992) studied were aimed at business or organizational communications. Dimmic, Siskand and Patterson (1994) had a different, 10-level set for their study "The Gratifications of the Household Telephone."

A study with closer correlation to this research is "Similarities in Patterns of Media Use: A Cluster Analysis of Media Gratifications," by William Elliott and Cynthia Quattlebaum (1979). Using standard quantitative survey methods, they had people rank books, friends, magazines, films, newspapers, radio, recorded music and television on how well they gratified 10 statements of need. In that study, newspapers ranked first among information sources in "to get to know the quality of our leaders," "to keep up with the way government is doing its job," "to obtain information about daily life," and "to feel I'm involved in important events." These are topics for which Berelson's readers also praised newspapers (public affairs, tools for daily living and social prestige). Newspapers ranked fourth in "to learn about myself" and sixth in "to kill time." They ranked eighth in "to overcome loneliness," "to release tension," "to get away from usual cares and problems" and "to be entertained." Most of these lower-ranked categories would fall in Berelson's areas of "respite" or "social contact." Although the Elliott-Quattlebaum study provided eye-opening data in its rankings, it suffered from the same "coldness" that Berelson found in the two other studies of the 1945 newspaper strike.

While uses and gratification tried to look deep into the individual for psychological motivations for media use, the media dependency theory developed to explain the sociological drivers of media use. As Merskin (1998) explains in "Media Dependency Theory: Origins and Directions," most people today live in an environment saturated by media messages. The central question of media dependency research, Merskin said, is "how did our world become so dependent on mass media, and how do mass mediated messages affect our lives?" (Merskin, 1998, Page 113).

Media dependency theory says that as society has become more urbanized, life has become less organized around traditional social groups like church and family. In their stead, the mass media provide support and guidance to get them though daily life – modern citizens become "dependent" upon the media, including their daily newspaper. Sandra Ball-Rokeach, one of the pioneers of this theory, took it another step by framing "media-system dependency." This extends the original notion of dependency to a societal level, proposing that the capacity of individuals to obtain their own goals is contingent upon the information resources of the media system of the society in which they live (Ball-Rokeach, 1985).

In the United States, Ball-Rokeach says, the extent of urbanization and the sophistication of the media means there are few, if any, functional alternatives to the media system for the average American to use to "stay in touch with the world." The significance of this, she notes, is that it provides evidence that the powerful audiences that uses and gratification theorists exalted most likely coexist with the powerful media that many of those same researchers rejected (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, Page 503).

The theory is not without critics. Working from an agenda-setting perspective, Wayne Wanta and Yu-Wei Wu (1994) used a survey to demonstrate that people actively build a sense of credibility for media on various subjects that interest them, after which the actual use of the media is less important. Individuals, they wrote, "do not necessarily need to develop a strong reliance on the media or increase their exposure to their messages to realize that the issues that the media cover are important" (Wanta and Wu, 1994, Page 97).

In addition, the term "dependency" leads to some confusion. Political economists write of the "dependency paradigm" as a neo-Marxist explanatory frame for the domination of U.S. cultural products. Psychology has literature about dependency by the library shelf. Though it explores personality dependencies on a whole raft of substances and situations, it seldom mentions the media. It may, in fact, contradict some of media dependency theory. Writing about clinically dependent personalities, Robert Bornstein (1992) said that people with strong dependency symptoms are often underachievers and show significantly lower academic performance. William Loges and Sandra Ball-Rokeach (1993) found a significant relationship between high income and media dependency, but no correlation between education and media dependency.

The habitual use of media and resistance to change by media manipulators is well documented, nevertheless. Matthew Ehrlich (1996) reviewed sociological and psychological literature to show that "ritual" was an appropriate concept with which to study journalism. Newspaper columnist Karen McCowan (1998) wrote that a change in editors of the Tribune Media Services' crossword puzzle editor unleashed a national outburst of emotion. "We were really shocked at how personally people take the puzzle," McCowan quoted TMS assistant editor Eve Becker. "Some said we'd wrecked their mornings, or that they could no longer finish the puzzle on their commute. Others thought they were developing Alzheimer's when they suddenly couldn't do the puzzles anymore" (McCowan, 1998).

The most clinical study of habitual media use appears to be Seth Finn's 1992 study of "television addiction." Finn tried to establish a link between heavy television use and substance abuse. Although he found similarities in the predictors of alcohol or drug addiction and those of heavy television use, his study found that TV "addicts" were less likely to drink heavily or use drugs than were casual viewers. He did, however, speculate that one behavior could be displacing the other.

In his initial paper, Berelson stated that the purpose of his study was to identify hypotheses that could be tested, in one way or another, by other methods. The literature suggests that Berelson's research indeed sparked myriad investigations into the use of newspapers by readers. However, it also seems evident that the "how" part of Berelson's study was followed up in much greater detail than the "why."

The Original Study

When the delivery workers of eight major New York City newspapers went on strike the afternoon of June 30,1945, Bernard Berelson of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University was curious. A week later, when New Yorkers still had no printed news and two scientific polls by national organizations appeared to be unable to address the attitudes of denied readers, Berelson went into action.

The strike lasted 17 days, and was so effective at stopping circulation that most New

Yorkers were effectively deprived of their regular paper. By going to a newsstand, they could buy one exempted newspaper, *PM*, and a few specialty publications. They could also buy copies of their regular paper at the counter of the paper's central office, but the vast majority of Gotham readers was left paperless (Berelson, 1949, Page 111). The Columbia researchers under Berelson elected to use what he called an "exploratory survey" that was quite different from the more traditional surveys launched by the Elmo Roper agency and by Fact Finders Associates, Inc. Berelson said that his goal was to understand the function of the modern newspaper for its readers: "Where the Roper and Fact Finders surveys were extensive, the Bureau's was intensive, designed to secure psychological insight in order to determine just what not having the newspaper meant to people" (Berelson, 1949, Page 112).

The strike offered an ideal laboratory, he said, because people are more conscious of what the newspaper means to them during such a "shock" period than under normal conditions. In addition, a crisis tends to make them more articulate about such matters (Berelson, 1949, Page 112-113).

Berelson used a questionnaire to frame interviews with 60 people scattered through the rental areas of Manhattan. While noting that it did not employ a statistically reliable sample, Berelson said he felt the technique allowed him to get beneath the "surface facts" that the other two polls targeted. Taken at face value, the 18 questions Berelson crafted for his project could be seen as a fairly standard quantitative survey. However, used as a framework to elicit quotes and comments from the subjects, it produced a much more subjective product and one that he said focused more on the emotions of the respondents.

There were, of course, a number of responses that paralleled the traditional surveys performed by the Elmo Roper agency and by Fact Finders Associates, Inc., not to mention earlier research and surveys taken in the 50 years since. Like the two other studies, Berelson found readers turned to the radio (there was no commercial television at the time) for news in lieu of their normal newspaper. But chief among the well-documented truisms of media research confirmed in all three studies was that "practically everyone pays tribute to the value of the newspaper as a source of 'serious' information about and interpretation of the world of public affairs" (Berelson, 1949, Page 114). He said that virtually all of his respondents lauded the paper for its informational and educational aspects.

However, Berelson found that his research echoed earlier studies in showing that not nearly as many people depended upon the paper for specific news as the number who claimed this was important. Very few respondents said they wanted a paper to keep up with the hot stories of the day, while many more responded with a variation on the cliche "to keep informed." In addition, few could name a serious news story that happened the week before the strike (Berelson, 1949, Page 114). The quotes that accompanied the "scores" to Berelson's questionnaire, nevertheless, filled in many of the blanks in this seeming contradiction. From these comments, he was able to identify five special uses for newspapers that regular readers seemed to desire:

Information and Interpretation of Public Affairs: The tribute Berelson's readers paid to the "serious" side of newspaper coverage was not limited to the front page. They were also interested in editorials, columns and commentaries, which left them dissatisfied with broadcast news as a replacement. As one strike-deprived reader said: "I don't have the details now, I just have the results … I miss the detail and the explanation of events leading up to the news."

Tools for Daily Living: The many lists, rosters, regular features, advertisements and calendars routinely published by newspapers were severely missed. Readers mentioned the obituaries, stock listings, retail ads, weather forecasts, recipes and (as World War II was just wrapping up) notices of troop-ship embarkations.

Respite: The relaxation or entertainment value of the daily newspaper was very highly rated by the readers. Berelson said reading "provides a vacation from personal care by transporting the reader outside his own immediate world." A New Yorker summarized it like this: "I didn't know what to do with myself. I was depressed. There was nothing to read and pass the time. I got the paper on Wednesday and felt a whole lot better" (Berelson, 1949, Page 119). His respondents in particular talked of the "human interest" content of their favorite papers. Berelson theorized that the accepted reputation and prestige of the newspaper as a provider of serious news enhanced its use for pure enjoyment – it satisfied the more low-brow needs of readers "without much cost to the reader's conscience."

Social Prestige: Many readers felt the newspaper was important not just because it gave them information, but because it enabled them to appear more informed at social gatherings. Berelson found it interesting that for some people, what was critical was not that the content of the newspaper was good, but that it was good for something: "Not that I am uneasy about what's happening, but I like to know about the country so when people ask you questions you don't feel dumb and silly." "It makes me furious, absolutely furious, because I don't know what's going on and all my friends who are getting the papers do" (Berelson, 1949, Page 120).

Social Contact: Berelson's final attribute of newspapers lays the groundwork for the media dependency theory discussed later in this paper. He found that the human interest stories, personal advice columns, gossip columns and their ilk provided much more than respite from daily routine. Many people, he found, used them as guides to prevailing morality, insight to the private lives of others and indirect "personal" contact with distinguished people. A few readers even said they missed the papers because, in a way, some of their friends resided in their pages. "I always used to condemn the mud-slinging in the *News* and *Mirror*, and many times I swore I'd never buy them if it weren't for the features I like. But just the other day I said to a friend of mine that I'd never, never talk like that about the papers again, because now I know what it is to be without them" (Berelson, 1949, Page 121).

Even after he had pulled together this list of reported newspaper attributes, Berelson found something missing in his analysis. Where the direct answers to his questions showed categories of desire, the follow-up conversations showed a less specific attraction to the newspaper.

He attempted to find answers in psychology. The psychology literature of the time gave him some insight, but it was so marginal he relegated it to just a footnote: When talking about how they missed the paper, many respondents mentioned a glass of water, a cup of coffee, an appetizer, a piece of candy or something else they would put in their mouth. Berelson found a tie to these statements with Margaret A. Ribble's writings on the oral fixation of infants. From his writing, Berelson obviously was not convinced that this was firm evidence of reading as "a socially acceptable source of oral pleasure." He conceded, however, that newspaper reading may "serve the function of a pacifier for adults" (Berelson, 1949, Page 123).

As he found no published theory to rely upon, Berelson turned to the comments of his respondents and cataloged them under his own list of "non rational" uses. These, he said, should be the basis of further "more intensive" research. The context of the newspaper creates an unusual set of human conditions, Berelson said. It is inexpensive and easy to acquire. Unlike books and magazines, it can be "conveniently taken in capsules" (read a bit at a time). Of all sources of reading material, it is the most readily available and easiest to consume.

The prime emotion these factors provide readers, Berelson speculated, is a sense of security -- or at least insecurity when deprived of it. One of his respondents said it bluntly: "I am like a fish out of water … I am lost and nervous. I'm ashamed to admit it" (Berelson, 1949, Page 125). This is closely tied to the ritualistic and near-compulsive character of newspaper reading, though whether the security leads to the ritual or the ritual leads to the security is a chicken-and-egg question. Either way, Berelson found strong evidence of compulsive or ritualistic behavior among his respondents. Many read their paper in the same way at the same time every day. At least half the respondents freely referred to the "habit" of newspaper reading, some using strong descriptions: "Something is missing in my life. I am suffering! Seriously. I could not sleep, I missed it so" (Berelson, 1949, Page 126).

Others, taking a new approach to the axiom "knowledge is power," said the absence of a newspaper made them weak. One man said he was uneasy "because I don't know what I am missing – and when I don't know, I worry" (Berelson, 1949, Page 126).

To be fair, not everyone missed the newspaper. A minority of respondents told Berelson they were a bit relieved to be without news of crime, war and mayhem. Nevertheless, Berelson concluded that his study showed that newspaper reading has value *per se* in our society.

Research Questions

As did Bereleson's earlier project, this research asks the face-value question of "why do people 'miss' their paper?" That question, is actually a framework for exploring the attitudes of readers toward newspapers.

The primary research question, then, is "Can newspaper readers articulate why they feel a need to read?"

Because Bereleson used a unique situation involving a massive labor strike, this project also has a secondary research question: "Does a short-term stoppage of newspaper delivery stimulate the same 'crisis-enhance articulation' abount newspapers that Berleson found?"

Methodology

As was true with the original study, this research is based on a limited number of in-depth but timely interviews of regular newspaper readers in a specific geographic area. A daily newspaper in rural eastern Oregon, with an evening circulation of approximately 12,500, agreed to make its daily "miss" list available to the researcher. This is the list of subscribers who have called the newspaper to report that they did not receive the newspaper as usual that day. Oversights by juvenile carriers, counting mistakes in the mail room or a vacation "stops" that go on too long create "misses" in the circulation systems of all home-delivered newspapers.

Circulation officials at the paper sent an electronic mail message to the researcher early each evening containing the names and telephone numbers of subscribers who called the newspaper office to complain that their newspapers were missing.

To make best use of the "shock" of missing the paper and to approximate the "crisis" situation that Berelson said increased the articulation and consciousness of his respondents, the researcher attempted to telephone the subscribers within a few hours of their non-delivery complaint to the newspaper. When a subscriber could not be reached that night, she or he was telephoned the next day. Once reached by telephone, permission was acquired from the respondents before they were interviewed.

Over a period of two weeks March 1998, 35 newspaper subscribers were interviewed by telephone and their comments transcribed. The respondents ranged in age from the early 30s to the late 80s, and included both residents of the larger "home" city of the newspaper and many of the smaller communities around it. This particular newspaper was selected because it has a high penetration in several of the towns that it serves and, because he is a former employee of the paper, the researcher had great familiarity with the issues and culture of the communities it serves. This significantly contributed to the ability to develop rapport with the subjects, as Alasuutari (1995) outlined in his description of the humanistic approach to testimony research.

Allowing the paper to select the names of subjects lacked the randomness to make the findings statistically reliable, but like Berelson's study, this project focused on making an exploration of the emotions of a group of people experiencing a common fate. What the selection procedure did assure was that the study conformed to the participant suitability standards for qualitative research outlined by Thomas Lindlof in *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (1995). Lindlof said interviewees should be selected for their appropriate experience in the cultural scene, ability to articulate their experience in an interview, and ability to devote time to the interview. The fact that the respondents had called the newspaper to report a delivery problem assured a level of appropriateness, the identification and introduction protocols of the Human Subjects Compliance procedure addressed the second factor, and the use of relatively brief telephone interviews conducted early in the evening addressed the third factor.

As did Berelson, this project employed a short list of questions (Appendix A) to guide interviews with the deprived readers. But also like Berelson, the study counted heavily on the ad lib comments of the participants to illustrate the emotions they felt. Subjects were asked to recreate their emotional condition at the moment they discovered their newspaper was missing, and to speculate what life would be like if a situation came up (like a move to the back country) where no paper would be available. They were also asked about what they read in the paper and why they felt it was important for others to read.

The techniques used in this study are consistent with the research procedure known as respondent interview, described by Lindlof (1995). This was especially appropriate because the technique was first described in 1944 by Paul Lazarsfeld, who was Berelson's editor at *Communications Research.* Lindlof summarized the aims of respondent interview technique as described by Lazarsfeld:

- To clarify the meanings of common concepts and opinions
- To distinguish the decisive elements of an expressed opinion
- To determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or to act in a certain way
- To classify complex attitude patterns
- To understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to ask

(Lindlof, 1995, Page 172)

The comments were analyzed critically and compared to the findings of Berelson and others. The search for what people missed about their newspapers took on many of the aspects of Erving Goffman's concept of "frame," and certainly was well within the bounds of the "factist perspective" described by Pertti Alasuutari in *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies* (1995).

Findings

Despite a physical separation of some 2,000 miles and the more dramatic historical distance of five decades, Bernard Berelson could have cited many of the comments received from the rural Oregonians who participated in this study. As he found with his urban New Yorkers, practically everyone contacted paid tribute to the "serious news" value of the newspaper – with a catch. Time and time again respondents in this study talked about the newspaper as a source of *local* news.

"I just wouldn't be as informed," replied one woman when asked what life would be like if she had to do without the paper permanently. "TV isn't really local,' she said. "We depend upon it to keep us informed about local news," another woman said of the relationship she and her husband have with the newspaper. "Not everyone needs it, but we do." "I think local news is really important," said yet another woman. "Everyone watches TV for national news; it's the local news that is important in the newspaper."

This subtle change from a generalized view of "news" to specifically "local news" may be attributable to two factors – one geographical and one historical. Berelson's subjects lived in one of the largest, most cosmopolitan cities in the United States. Given the size and international impact of New York, it may be difficult to distinguish what "local" means for those who live there. For rural Oregonians living in towns of a few thousand souls, "local news" is easily defined as that which involves their friends and neighbors.

Even so, Morris Janowitz, a contemporary of Berelson, found similar weight to local news even at an urban level when he studied supplementary neighborhood newspapers in cities. In *The Community Press in an Urban Setting* (1952), he noted "the community press is generally perceived as an extension of the reader's personal and social contacts because of its emphasis on news about voluntary associations and local social and personal news" (Page 142).

A second factor is the major change in the news environment since Berelson conducted his study – the advent of television. While the only electronic alternative available to Berelson's subjects in 1945 was radio, surveys show that approximately 72 percent of Americans say they rely on television for most of their news (Feder, 1997). But the broad geographic area over which a television signal ranges may preclude the detailed local coverage of smaller towns that newspapers are often able to provide. This apparent advantage for newspapers in rural areas may be transitory, however. Stavitsky (1994) wrote that some media – notably public radio – are changing their definition of localism from the traditional *spatial* emphasis to a *social* concept. Social localism is already employed by media in Western Europe, where media operators target people with similar interests, tastes and values, rather than similar addresses. If the focus of interest in rural American communities switches from spatial to social localism, the "local news" niche filled now by newspapers could be filled by media far from the homes of audience members.

The personal role a newspaper plays in their lives was often best explained by the respondents to this study when they were asked to describe the emotions they felt at the moment they realized their newspaper was not going to arrive this particular evening. The readers expressed a mixture of disappointment and loss, but not anger. "I was kind of upset, and wondered what the heck had happened," said one 80-year-old woman. "We look forward to the paper coming. It's kind of like a friend or neighbor coming in." "I was disappointed," said a man who had subscribed for 18 years. "It is a service I'm paying for, but I'm not getting it." "I was frustrated, because I look forward to getting the paper," said a 56-year-old man of missing that night's paper. "I mean, part of my nightly ritual is to read the newspaper."

This reader and others, however, often qualified their statements of irritation with comments of understanding for their young newspaper carriers. "I felt that I was missing out on something," said a 60-year-old man. "I wanted to know what the headlines were and if anything had happened in the area. I felt like Rodney Dangerfield – no respect. Then my wife reminded me that we had a new carrier. I carried papers when I was a kid, too, so I know you've got to cut them a little slack."

That there was no anger expressed may be attributed to the fact that, with few exceptions, the respondents had received a substitute paper from the publishing company shortly after they called the circulation department. (A company official explained that carriers are required by contract to respond to complaint calls within 15 minutes.)

Nevertheless, as Berelson found, the "crisis" (even if a "mini crisis") of being paperless seemed to make subscribers eloquent about the role a newspaper plays in their lives. Asked how they would cope if they had to move to a mountain community that had no newspaper delivery, some of the readers were plaintive: "We would have to have some sort of paper, even if it came by mail," said one woman. "We could watch TV, but it's not like having a paper in the hands."

"We'd probably have to rely more on radio, but it probably wouldn't be enough for us," said a man who had subscribed to a newspaper for 28 years. "When we got to town, we would just have to buy some newspapers."

A 42-year-old father of two and an avid outdoorsman waxed poetic about his love affair with the newspaper, after explaining that he would go to great lengths to find an edition to read: "Let me explain it this way. When I go hunting, I always take four or five newspapers with me up to the mountains. Reading is relaxing, like sitting on the bank fishing. It gives me a chance to unwind."

While Berelson's five newspaper attributes – public affairs information, tools for daily living, respite, social prestige and social contact – seemed to hold in the Oregon study, the notions of "ritual" and of "interactive shared use" of the newspaper came to the forefront. For almost all the respondents, reading the evening newspaper was a daily ritual that seldom varied. This was especially true of retired couples, who almost always said they read the paper in the same manner: Each took a section of the paper to their favorite easy chair, read it leisurely, then exchanged sections with their partner. Conversation and commentary on stories was reported as a frequent part of this newsreading ritual. Even the exchange of sections was a source of entertainment for one couple: "We have a great lot of fun sailing it across the room," said a 60-year-old woman who, with her husband, had subscribed for 30 years. "We laugh about it and tell our friends that we spent the evening throwing the newspaper at each other."

About half the couples said they have a routine in which one partner always grabs a particular section (husbands often went for the sports section), but for others it was first come, first served. "We just split it up," one man said. "We are democratic about it, even though we are Republicans. It depends on who gets it first."

A mid-30s mother of two described the daily delivery of the newspaper as an all-family event. "My sixth-grade son grabs the front section and reads all the news. My fourth-grade daughter flips through all the sections, looking for names of people she knows. My husband reads the whole paper, cover to cover. I just read the headlines and the obituaries. I'm a nurse, so I always look to see if any of my patients have died."

Respondents often referred back to this social ritual of reading the paper if asked why they couldn't just turn on the television news and do without the paper. Here they were less articulate, but insisted that the newspaper was more to them than information on a page. "I just kind of like the whole thing," explained a woman who reads and discusses the paper with her husband every evening. A 73-year-old woman said the paper actually provides a sense of physical comfort for her that she doesn't get from television. "The paper doesn't glare back at you," she said.

The permanence and physical presence of the newspaper was also mentioned as an important quality. Several people talked of clipping stories and sending them to friends or posting them on their refrigerators. Others said the paper gave them more control over their news intake. "If the phone rings while I am watching TV news, it's gone," said a 57-year-old man. "But with the newspaper, I can go at my own pace and take all the time I want to digest it and really get meaning out of it."

Some readers said how they look for a different key pieces of information in each day's papers: Grocery ads on Tuesday, entertainment news on Thursday, church news on Friday, etc. One woman said that even the editorial opinions give her multiple pleasures. Sometimes she happily reads opinions she agrees with, "but lots of times I like to get mad at it. I read it just to disagree with it."

Also playing heavily in the ritual category was the attraction of crossword puzzles. Several readers mentioned that they eagerly look forward to the puzzle each day, and one even said she refuses to buy a nearby metropolitan paper because the puzzle it runs is too difficult. Other newspaper items that readers said they read habitually were the advertisements (especially the Tuesday grocery ads), the recipes, the comics, the feature stories, a "this date in history" column and the letters to the editor. One 33-year-old man said he pores over the legal ads every night to see if he can find a mortgage foreclosure he can afford to bid upon.

Almost without exception (and often with a hearty laugh), the respondents freely admitted to their newspaper "habit." None, however, found anything negative in this and most said that if their own children and neighbors had a stronger newspaper habit, they would be better citizens.

The most frequently mentioned non-news content of the paper, emphasizes the way a newspaper moves the shared interactive use out of the house and into the community. "We check the obits every night to see if our names are in there," said one man with a chuckle. Then he seriously explained that in his community, it was important to know when a neighbor had died, both so one could express condolence and to discuss the death with other neighbors.

His observation about obituaries gives credence to vicarious social interaction aspect of the media dependency theory and reflects the unique social role of the obit Kennedy described in *Community Journalism: A Way of Life* (1974). "A death in the community is a death in the family," Kennedy wrote of smaller communities. "Strangers are few, nearly everyone is a celebrity of sorts.

Obituaries and the special social obligations they signal were the main stimulus to one man's complaint call to the paper. The respondent, a subscriber for 40 years, lives on an Indian reservation and knew from a neighbor that a fellow tribal member had died. He was anxiously awaiting the paper for information about the complex set of funeral rites his tribe performs, and was irritated that he had already missed at least one ceremony.

Other readers noted that they read obituaries of people they have never known, but that they find in the obits interesting profiles of the people around them. That personal nature of the obituaries was once more prevalent throughout the paper, several elderly readers said. One 80-year-old woman noted that newspapers now run significantly less "social" news today than they did when she began reading as a youth. The lack of old-style society columns may be a reason newspaper readership has declined, she said. "Way back then, they had a lot of social things, stories about people you might want to meet." The personal importance of such "news," she said, made her quickly come to rely on the newspaper as a social guide. While conceding the same topics may not be popular today, she said that finding a similar means of passionately attracting readers should be key to modern editors.

Discussion

The simple answer to the research question "can newspaper readers articulate why they feel a need to read?" is "no." But as Berelson and others researchers have found, there are no "simple" answers in communications research.

The comments made the participants in this research – and those made in the 1945 New York study – detail not one but many reasons why people like their newspaper when they have it and and miss it when it is gone. The sheer number and variety of those comments demonstrate the tongue-loosening effect of even a brief interuption of newspaper service, but also could be interpreted as confusion or an inability to define what is important about newspaper reading.

Certainly the ardor with which respondents defended their newspaper habit reinforced some of the premises Ball-Rokeach and others describe in media dependency theory, but the difficulty the respondents had tying their enjoyment of the paper to particular content is problematic. The newspaper's local news and other content realistically could be replaced by other media. But time and again, the subjects of these interviews alluded to an indescribable "something" that made the newspaper itself important to them.

By looking beyond the comments themselves and toward that unarticulated "something," one begins, however, to see a trend that comfortably nests into the sociology roots of media dependency theory.

The unifying function of the newspaper buried in the comments of the respondents was of social integration. Whether it was by providing them news of their neighbors, helping cope with the death of a friend or simply telling them that tuna was on sale at the market, the newspaper made survival in their community much easier and more enjoyable, a function of the community community building ability of the press to which Janowitz (1952) alluded.

Part of the success of newspapers in this field may be due to the mixture of "legitimate" news and community gossip that allows readers to fulfill their politically incorrect desire to be "nosy" in a way that is not only accepted, but lauded by society. Janowitz discussed this at length: "Regardless of their genuine interests in the news of the community, readers want their interest in "gossip" served in the false packaging of the more prestigeful daily press" (Janowitz, 1952, Page 136)

If they just used the back-fence gossip pipeline, community news readers would be accused of cliquishness and scandal mongering. But by reading about their neighbors in the paper, they appear "legitimately informed." One respondent in this study put it in his own words: "When you are reading, you are learning about the people you work with and grew up with, and people you don't even know."

There is also some evidence that the newspaper simply does a better job of transmitting personally important information than does the "neighborhood grapevine." Demers (1996) said that reporters better understand how to gain access to centers of power in a community, and are more reliable and efficient at gathering information than the average citizen.

Despite this strong evidence of a social integration role for newspapers, one cannot understate the hard-to-quantify "comfort" value of newspaper reading. The comment by one woman that watching TV is "not like having a paper in the hands" may be more salient than it first seems. As the respondents described their daily "ritual" of reading, there was obvious pleasure in their voices. The comfort provided in reading a familiar publication, with familiar content in their familiar easy chair had tremendous value to them.

This researcher's own experience in the newspaper industry, the comments of the respondents to this study and multiple references in the literature point to the news content carried by newspapers as be the industry's "franchise." However, this research and that published by Berelson suggests that there is something beyond the news that for at least 50 years has attracted readers. It is an aura, an ambience, a special feeling of comfort that is ripe for additional research. One could , for instance, compare the emotional and socioligical satisfaction people find across a variety of media. The search for that " something special " could also reverse agenda-setting research, using similar techniques to determine which agenda-setting vehicle consumers choose from the mass of modern media, and why.

Perhaps, as Berelson noted, the secret of media uses lies not so much in the message, but in "the desirability of reading" (Berelson, 1949, Page 122).

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Think back, if you will, to the moment when you realized your newspaper was not delivered tonight. What emotions went through your mind? Is there any word or phrase that describes your feelings at that instant?

2. What do you think was behind those feelings of (anger, annoyance, puzzlement, etc.)?

3. If for some reason that newspaper never gets to you tonight, what will you miss the most?

4. If for some reason you could no longer get a daily newspaper (like if you moved to a very rural area), how would your life change? What would you do to compensate?

5. Is it important that people read the newspaper? Why?

6. Is there any continuing story that has happened over the past few weeks that you particularly missed following up on when you didn't get your paper tonight?

7. Tell me a little bit about how you read your newspaper. (Do you sit on the coach with the TV going, sit at the kitchen table, share sections with your spouse, read in bed, etc.). Do you always read the paper in the same way? What do you read first? Is there anything that you are careful to never miss in the paper?

8. Do you read the comics or work the crossword? How important is that activity to you?

9. Is there one person in your household who likes reading the newspaper better than others?

10. Is there anything the publisher could do to make the newspaper better for you?

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Newspaper Ombudsmanship

as Viewed by Ombudsmen and their Editors

by

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Newspaper Ombudsmanship

As Viewed by Ombudsmen and their Editors

INTRODUCTION

Declining readership of American newspapers is being correlated with growing public mistrust of--and disrespect for--the news media. Polls show that many Americans believe the press is antagonistic, arrogant, biased and inaccurate. Contempt for the media has reached new levels in recent years, and studies show it continues to rise.

Indeed, a report released in March, 1997, by The Pew Research Center for The People & the Press showed that 56 percent of Americans think news stories and reports are often inaccurate, a 22-percent increase over responses to the same survey question in 1985. Only 27 percent said the press deals fairly with all sides in reporting social and political news, while that figure was 34 percent in 1985. And 54 percent of Americans said they believe the media hamper society in solving its problems ("Press Unfair . . ." 1997).

Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that circulation figures for several dominant newspapers have declined dramatically in recent years. Major newspapers in the U.S. lost thousands of readers in the 1990s (*Editor & Publisher* 1992, 1996). Twelve of the largest 25 newspapers with Sunday editions saw circulation declines during 1997 (Fitzgerald 1997). And the outlook dims. Some media experts cite predictions that fewer than half of all Americans will read newspapers by the year 2010 (Marks 1997).

Accordingly, public skepticism and disdain for the press have been identified by working journalists and scholars as fundamental problems. Journalism professionals have even voiced fear that the profession may self-destruct, so to speak, and that government regulation may loom on the horizon (Marks 1997).

Professional journalism organizations are heeding the crisis. Among them are the Freedom Forum, the Nieman Foundation and the American Society of Newspaper Editors

(ASNE). ASNE is particularly concerned with the issue of newspaper credibility and has undertaken a study to analyze reasons for the profession's faltering reputation ("ASNE Launches . . ." 1997). ASNE President Sandra Mims Rowe said the study, known as the Journalism Credibility Study, is aimed at creating a comprehensive plan to enhance newspaper credibility and public confidence in the news media.

The project is partly funded by the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation. One portion of the study, overseen by ASNE's Ethics and Values Committee, focuses on newspapers and the issue of ombudsmen or staff members holding an equivalent position. Other elements include a credibility think tank involving ASNE members and professional journalists who will meet to study the problem, examine research conclusions, and suggest solutions to the credibility problem; a review of existing research on credibility to create a baseline of information on public viewpoints and how they mesh with journalistic practices; two random sample studies of 1,200 individuals to examine questions not investigated in previous research; and test site partnerships with eight newspapers to study journalism credibility in their local communities ("ASNE Launches . . ." 1997).

The ombudsman position has been identified by media professionals as one tool for enhancing newspaper integrity and credibility. In general, an ombudsman receives and analyzes complaints from readers about concerns such as fairness, balance, taste and accuracy, then suggests appropriate remedies to correct or clarify media reports. The first newspaper ombudsman position was created in 1967 by the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and *Times* ("What is an Ombudsman?" 1998). Today, newspaper ombudsmen are relatively rare, employed by fewer than 40 of the nation's 1,520 daily newspapers (Marquand 1998). Yet some scholars assert that the ombudsman position can make a significant contribution to media accountability by raising questions internally and by writing columns that address issues of press behavior (e.g., Klaidman and Beauchamp 1987, 227-229; and Goodwin and Smith 1994, 297-300).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project focuses on newsroom views--specifically those of editors and ombudsmen--concerning the ombudsman role. Some research based on content analyses of ombudsmen's columns has concluded that ombudsmen primarily serve a public relations role (Sanders and Nemeth 1997; Nemeth and Sanders 1996). Other work has shown that the presence of newspaper ombudsmen does not affect journalists' views of controversial news gathering techniques but that an ombudsman's presence could suggest to staffers how serious the newspaper is about its relationship to its audience (Pritchard 1993). In a study of newspapers with and without ombudsmen, McKinzie writes that the approach to resolving reader complaints and disputes by newspapers with ombudsmen suggests a positive influence on "public perceptions of newspaper quality and credibility" (1994, 21).

This study is concerned with the way in which ombudsmen and editors define ombudsmen's duties, the perceived impact of ombudsmen on the newspaper staff and whether--from the ombudsmen's and editors' vantage point--reporters are influenced in a way that enhances accountability and, hence, credibility. Editors and ombudsmen at 29 newspapers across the country provided their insight.

METHODOLOGY

A list of newspapers with ombudsmen on staff was obtained from the Organization of News Ombudsmen (ONO), and questionnaires were distributed to both ombudsmen and editors at these newspapers. Ombudsmen were asked to answer 11 questions; editors were asked to answer five. Questions were devised after examining several ombudsmen studies, including Thomas' extensive study of ombudsmen backgrounds and activities (1995). While the focus was on ombudsmen's and editors' perceptions of whether the ombudsman position enhances credibility, a range of questions was presented. Researchers posed specific inquiries about the primary complaints received by ombudsmen, their suggested solutions and their input on advantages and disadvantages of the position. Similar questions were posed to editors. (See Appendices A and B for the questionnaires.)

Questionnaires were sent by e-mail, in most cases. Where e-mail addresses were not available, the questionnaires were faxed. In many cases, questionnaires were re-sent or telephone messages were left as reminders to respondents. Most responses were received by e-mail and fax, and several were obtained through telephone interviews.

We should note that while some ombudsmen were actually referred to as reader representatives or assistant to the editor, we deferred to the term "ombudsman," as used in the name of the organization. Also, although ONO has several electronic media members and a number of international members, we confined ourselves to United States newspapers.

RESULTS

A profile of the ombudsman

Twenty-six of the 32 ombudsmen contacted responded to the survey, or 81 percent. Of those, 18 filled full-time positions; and eight either worked part-time in this post and filled other duties at the newspaper, or worked part-time on a contract basis.

Most ombudsmen were also seasoned journalists. The respondents averaged 30 years of journalism experience. They averaged five years of experience as ombudsmen, ranging from one to 17 years of service. One newspaper had created the ombudsman staff position 30 years ago, while at three newspapers the position was just a year old. Overall, respondents said the position had been in existence for an average of 12 years.

From the ombudsman's perspective

Each was asked to provide a synopsis of his or her duties. On average, each spent 40 percent of his or her time--a clear majority--dealing directly with readers' concerns. Seventeen said they also prepare reader columns, and 12 reported they participate in outside activities with readers, including such activities as forums, seminars and leading tours through the newsroom. About half reported miscellaneous duties, ranging from handling reprint permission requests to redirecting delivery complaints. All but a few ombudsmen said they responded to a managing editor or executive editor. Three others said they report to the publisher; one said he reported to the editorial page editor, and another to the chief executive editor. Several noted that they work independently.

As expected, ombudsmen overwhelmingly reported that they see their most important duty as interacting with readers and providing readers with a "voice" in the newsroom. Bringing the public's views into journalism often spurs discussions "about how those views can help support good journalism," one ombudsman noted. Some said simply listening to readers helps: "I can't tell you how many, many people have called me to complain and, in the end, tell me how much they have appreciated the opportunity to talk to someone at the newspaper . . . even if there's nothing that can be done to totally satisfy them," said Joe Sheibley, ombudsman at the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel* .

"Readers feel that their concerns are important to the newspaper and that one of our functions is to serve them better," said Dorothea Smith, reader services editor for Gannett Suburban Newspapers, White Plains, NY. "The reaching-out function of the job brings the newspaper closer to readers and gives individuals a chance to affect our coverage."

As a newsroom-reader liaison, ombudsmen also deal with staff members frequently. John Bull, ombudsman at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, sees two-way communication as a crucial part of his job. "I let the staff know reader reaction to what we did--or didn't--do." Bull said he also suggests alternative ways that "they could have said the same thing without either pulling their punches or catering to individual reader prejudices." This liaison "eases the way for readers to contact the paper," noted Miriam Pepper, associate editor at the *Kansas City Star*. "Many callers are hesitant to contact a writer, and need a point of entry to the staff."

Most complaints received by ombudsmen focus on errors, either factual or grammatical. A close second was the issue of bias in reporting. Objections to stories or photographs that were seen as insensitive, tasteless or an invasion of privacy ranked third.

Ombudsmen also were asked to recommend methods for reducing complaints. Almost all recommended better reporting and editing, in addition to better training for reporters. Other top suggestions: "sensitivity training" for reporters and editors to address bias; and more discussion of news placement and content with readers' viewpoints in mind.

Requiring journalists to become more accountable for their errors was advocated by many respondents. Reporters need to "bleed more" over their mistakes, said Phil Record, ombudsman (now retired) at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. "When a writer causes harm or inconvenience to a reader because of carelessness, order the writer to call the reader and apologize. Let them share the reader's hurt or concern."

From the editors' perspective

Replies were received from 17 of the 32 editors who were contacted, or 53 percent. On average, editors believe the ombudsmen at their newspapers spent 46 percent of their time dealing with direct communication from readers. This perception is slightly higher than the 40 percent reported by ombudsmen. However, the difference may occur because some ombudsmen work independently of their supervisors. (Said one ombudsman: "I see [my boss] at the annual Christmas party.") In fact, many editors were unable to answer this question.

Editors were asked to identify their ombudsman's most important duty. The collective answer was resounding: to listen to--and represent--the public. In doing so, one editor concisely noted that the ombudsman puts a "human face and a human voice" on a large newspaper. "Dealing with public complaints is the essence of his job. He offers an otherwise unburdened ear to the concerns and complaints of our readers," said Tim McGuire, editor of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.

Almost one third of the editors surveyed did not know why their newspapers had initially hired ombudsmen. Of those, most said they were uncertain because the decision preceded their own hiring. Among other respondents, more than half said the position was created as a commitment to represent readers' interests. One editor said the decision was simply a "common sense" move. Another said it was the "first step" to getting in better touch with readers. Tim Harmon, managing editor at the *South Bend Tribune* (Indiana), had a similar reply: "We felt it was vital to pay more focused attention to the readers."

Ombudsmen's impact on staff

A clear majority of ombudsmen--65 percent--said their presence makes reporters more careful, and that more attention is paid to accuracy and fairness. One mentioned that reporters even come to him first when errors are made. Having an ombudsman on board "definitely raises the consciousness of staff," said Gina Lubrano, ombudsman for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Ombudsman Pat Riley (now retired) of the *Orange County Register* (California) said many reporters over the years have told him they are more careful because of the issues he raises in his column. Being on staff makes reporters "much more aware of accuracy and fairness," said Lynn Feigenbaum, ombudsman at the *Virginian-Pilot* in Norfolk.

At the *Sacramento Bee*, Ombudsman Stephanie Christensen believes the staff has grown more careful, accurate and sensitive in recent years. "This has been accomplished without any kind of chilling effect on them," she noted.

Some 25 percent of the ombudsmen gave mixed reviews, saying their presence enhanced staff dedication "to some degree," or that the difference they made varied. On "good" days, *Washington Post* Ombudsman Geneva Overholser says she believes her efforts contribute to a higher level of accountability and fairness. "On my bad days, I think I've just made everyone so mad they're allergic to what I say, and have left the readers feeling that they're well-heard, but that it stops right there." Likewise, noted Linda Raymond, ombudsman at the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, "On bad days, I don't think I make much difference On better days, I help raise staff consciousness on issues readers consider important."

Among editors, nine of 17 said the ombudsman post has promoted a heightened sense of responsibility among reporters. "It affects how we handle a story . . . The reporters know they can't get off scot-free," said William C. Boyne, editor/publisher of the *Rochester Post-Bulletin*. (Minnesota).

Perhaps the comments of Ken Brusic, executive editor of the *Orange County Register*, best summed up the sentiments of many editors: "Our staff understands that we have a formal procedure for investigating [reader] concerns and responding to readers, sometimes in a very public way. That procedure reinforces the paper's commitment to accuracy and fairness."

Several editors said the ombudsman position has helped address readers' concerns and streamlined the process for making corrections. A clear majority, however, voiced the benefits in terms of enhanced accountability and representation in the newsroom. "The staff has a natural tendency to marginalize reader interests. The ombudsman is charged with keeping the readers' point of view prominent in the newsroom," said Arthur Brisbane, publisher at the *Kansas City Star*.

"It's critical to our credibility to have someone whose job it is to represent the customer. In sensitive situations, it gives us a level of caution and helps ensure that we treat the matter with care from the beginning," noted Carole Leigh Hutton, editor at the *Detroit Free Press*. "That can thwart not only bad feelings but lawsuits." Significantly, some research has shown that many libel suits are filed after a complainant has contacted the media and received an unsatisfactory response (Bezanson, Cranberg and Soloski 1987, 34-37).

Two editors reported mixed results. One of the two, Gregory Favre, executive editor at the *Sacramento Bee*, said the ombudsman deals with "superficial issues" and exerts little influence on the reporting staff but occasionally causes the staff to reflect on its actions.

Views from within the same newsroom

Responses were received from both the editors and the ombudsmen of 14 newspapers. Analyzed separately, these “matched” responses--which are integrated with other responses already presented--show similar patterns to the pooled results.

Editors and ombudsmen working together concur that listening to readers is the ombudsman's most important responsibility. "My most important duty is to be an arbitrator, whether it favors our newspaper or the readers, and to make every effort to answer their concerns," said Paul Bartley, ombudsman at the *Bradenton Herald* (Florida). Executive Editor Wayne Poston agreed: "Readers are guaranteed that someone will listen to them--for whatever reason."

Similarly, *Arizona Republic* Ombudsman Richard de Uriarte said the most significant part of his job is to act as a conduit of information. Deputy Editor John D'Anna said de Uriarte's most important duty is to "de-mystify the newspaper" for readers -- to explain the story behind the story.

Almost all of the editors and ombudsmen jointly agreed that having the ombudsman position influences their staff in a positive way. “He reminds them every day of who it is they're really working for," said Harmon of the *South Bend Tribune*. Two ombudsmen voiced uncertainty about whether they influenced the staff. The editors at these respective newspapers said they did, in fact, influence staff. "He makes us think twice" before a decision is carried out, one editor noted.

DISCUSSION

A majority of both editors and ombudsmen involved in this study unquestionably agreed: Having an ombudsman on staff influences the reporters and editors in a way that enhances fairness and accuracy--and, presumably, credibility. The two groups also agreed on the main advantages and disadvantages to having an ombudsmen on staff.

Top advantages included direct access for readers, providing readers with "a voice" and showing them someone will listen. "The major advantage is having someone detached from daily production who can listen to public comments about the newspaper and distill them in a useable way for journalists," said Michele McLellan, ombudsman at the *Portland Oregonian*.

Disadvantages to having an ombudsman included shielding reporters and editors from complaints, and that some ombudsmen have "too many kooks and regular callers" whose views may not be representative of all readers. A third of the newspaper professionals we contacted--15 of the 43--said they saw no disadvantage to having an ombudsman on staff.

Our results tend to solidify and extend findings of previous studies. For example, McKinzie (1994) concludes, albeit tentatively, that news organizations with ombudsmen rank higher in credibility than those without ombudsmen. This question--what is the real impact of an ombudsman on the public?--has not been answered and demands to be addressed. Perhaps news organizations with and without ombudsmen could be matched on the basis of community and media characteristics and then a comparison made of the public's perceptions, including credibility, of the news organizations.

On the surface, facilitating better understanding and communications in both directions--to the readers and to the staff--would appear to be beneficial. It makes sense that a newspaper should have a solid and independent mechanism for feedback. As one editor noted, "We do not write into a vacuum." Providing such a service to readers may help restore virtue in the newspaper industry.

At the same time, both defenders and critics have to acknowledge that ombudsmanship is not a panacea to what ails newspapers. A national study of newspaper handling of complaints indicates that nearly 8 out of every 10 newspapers with a circulation of 25,000 or more do not have a systematic means of recording the volume and nature of complaints about news coverage (Shepard 1998). An ombudsman at least provides a mechanism to deal with the newspaper-audience relationship thoughtfully, systematically and responsibly.

It would behoove more newspapers to consider adding an ombudsman to their staffs. But simply adding the position does not assure desired goals will be achieved. The fact remains that most ombudsmen walk a tightrope between their newsrooms and their readers. Credibility of the ombudsman--from the standpoint of newsroom personnel as well as from the standpoint of readers--may be the most critical factor in the effectiveness of ombudsmanship. As some ombudsmen assert, a greater impact could be made if they were to take a more active stance in promoting their own visibility and in representing reader interests (Stein 1998).

Today, as Marquand (1998) notes, only 2.4 percent of all daily newspapers employ ombudsmen. This barely represents a blip on the nation's newspaper scene. Yet the concept of the ombudsman obviously has staying power, and most news organizations with ombudsmen firmly endorse the idea.

The ultimate issue may be the pocketbook. Several respondents to this study cited the cost of an ombudsman as one drawback, a factor which may explain the small number. In light of declining readership, a different picture could emerge if it is shown that investing in ombudsmen provides an economic payoff for the newspaper industry.

Appendix A--Questionnaire for Editors

(distributed by e-mail and/or fax)

TO: ____

Fax # ____________________

ASNE--Survey Of Editors Of Newspapers With Ombudsmen

As you may know, the American Society of Newspaper Editors is engaged in a study of newspaper credibility. I am assisting in a portion of that study dealing with ombudsmen (including staff members who hold an equivalent position) for ASNE's Ethics and Values Committee.

We'd like you to respond to the following questions. Please do so in the space provide or on a separate sheet of paper referring to each of the responses by question number. Please fax response to: (319) 335-5210.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with Ken Starck at (319 335-3353) or at kenneth-starck@uiowa.edu or by fax at (319) 335-5210.

Thanks for your help.

1. We would like you to describe the duties of your newspaper's ombudsman. Please do this by listing all of the ombudsman's tasks that come to your mind. Also, please give us your best guess as to the percentage of time the ombudsman devotes to each of these tasks (EXAMPLE: write column--25 %).

2. If you had to list ONE DUTY of the ombudsman that--from your point of view--is MOST IMPORTANT, what would that be?

3. What do you consider to be the main advantages and disadvantages to your organization having an ombudsman?

ADVANTAGES?

DISADVANTAGES?

4. What was the main reason (or reasons) your newspaper decided to hire an ombudsman?

5. Do you think having an ombudsman in the organization influences the behavior of the staff? (IF YES, in what way(s)? IF NO, Why not?)

RETURN TO FAX: (319) 335-5210

Appendix B--Questionnaire for Ombudsmen

(distributed by e-mail and/or fax)

TO: ____

Fax # ____________________

ASNE--Survey Of Ombudsmen

As you may know, the American Society of Newspaper Editors is engaged in a study of newspaper credibility. I am assisting in a portion of that study dealing with ombudsmen (including staff members who hold an equivalent position) for ASNE's Ethics and Values Committee.

We'd like you to respond to the following questions. Please do so in the space provide or on a separate sheet of paper referring to each of the responses by question number. Please fax response to: (319) 335-5210.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with Ken Starck at (319 335-3353) or at kenneth-starck@uiowa.edu or by fax at (319) 335-5210.

Thanks for your help.

1. We would like you to describe your duties as ombudsman. Please do this by listing all of the tasks you routinely carry out. Also, please give us your best guess as to the percentage of time you devote to each of these tasks (EXAMPLE: write column--25 %).

2. What are the top five kinds of complaints you receive?

3. With reference to the top complaints, what do you think can be done to prevent or reduce the number of complaints (EXAMPLE: more careful editing).

4. What do you consider to be the main advantages and disadvantages to your organization having an ombudsman?

ADVANTAGES?

DISADVANTAGES?

5. If you had to list ONE OF YOUR DUTIES that--from your point of view--is MOST IMPORTANT, what would that be?

6. Do you think having an ombudsman in the organization influences the behavior of the staff? (IF YES, in what way(s)? IF NO, Why not?)

7. In your organization, to whom do you report directly (that is, who is your supervisor)?

8. How many years has your newspaper had an ombudsman position?

9. How many years have you been in this position?

10. Is the ombudsman position full time?

11. How many years have you been working as a journalist?

RETURN TO FAX: (319) 335-5210

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Free Trade or Fair Trade?

The U.S. Auto Trade Policy and the Press

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Free Trade or Fair Trade?

The U.S. Auto Trade Policy and the Press

Abstract

Conducting both quantitative and qualitative content analyses, this study shows that the auto elite set the agenda for the *New York Times* and *Detroit News*, both of which were inclined to have their news coverage of the auto trade conflicts between the U.S. and Japan biased toward the so-called fair trade, not free trade. Additionally, the *News* is more likely than the *Times* to be more biased, especially when the conflicts were mounting.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare the news coverage of the automobile trade dispute between the United States and Japan in two American newspapers. What is the role of the newspapers in their extensive reporting of the issue over the years, and how is the agenda-setting mechanism formed and working? While the agenda-setting theory has been broadly analyzed by scholars studying numerous domestic and foreign policies, it has scarcely been applied to study the international trade issues or commercial policies, despite the escalating prominence of world trade.[1]

The trade imbalance between the United States and Japan has existed for decades, and the resulting conflicts between the two economic powers have been intensified with the continuous surge in the trade deficit. The Japanese automobile trade surplus with the U.S. was estimated at some $31 billion, or nearly three-quarters of its total trade surplus with America in 1990.[2] In 1994, whereas the number moved up only a bit to $37 billion, the percentage declined considerably to about 55 percent of the total $66 billion trade surplus.[3] The tension over automobile trade reached its peak in June 1995. The U.S. government announced its intention to impose 100 percent "punitive tariffs" valued at $5.9 billion on the Japanese auto industry in retaliation for Japan's alleged unfair trade practice. Japan, on the other hand, accused its rival of abandoning the free trade principle pledged to in the World Trade Organization (WTO). The issue later was, once again, resolved in a

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[1] One of the very few studies touching on this perspective was conducted by professor Wayne Wanta of the University of Oregon. Wayne Wanta and Y.W. Hu, "The Agenda-Setting Effects of International News Coverage-An Examination of Differing News Frames," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 3 (fall 1993): 250-264. In their study, Wanta and Hu found that international trade coverage, particularly when the United States is not involved, have a much weaker agenda-setting impact on public concerns. They also concluded the weak agenda-setting effect in the international trade issues is due mostly to their abstractness.

[2] Leslie Helm and Donald Woutat, "Angry Reaction to Japan's Auto Quota Renewal," *The Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 1991, sec. D, p. 2.

[3] Andrew Pollack, "Detroit's Japan-Friendly Cars Go to Tokyo," *The New York Times*, 25 October 1995, sec. D, p. 1.

"peaceful" way, with the Japanese forced to make another commitment to restrain "voluntarily" its auto exports to the United States.

The concept of "fair trade" is reported and used frequently by the news media, regarding international trade, particularly in the issue under investigation. It is confusing and misleading because there exists in economics no such idea as "fair trade," as opposed to the more common free trade. How was the fair-trade concept formatted and framed? And by whom? In other words, who sets the agenda of the fair trade concept and policy?

Significance of the Study

This study aims to offer an alternative explanation and answer to the old question: Who sets the media's agenda? Previous research has found that there exist a number of sources for media agenda-setting effect, but led to no conclusive answers. The news media are considered highly susceptible to external forces, including multinational corporations such as automobile firms. This research can therefore also provide insights in future studies of the kinship between trade policy and the press, particularly when international trade activities and the accompanying conflicts have become increasingly notable.

Literature Review

The agenda-setting theory basically states that media content affects how the public perceives the salience of the today's issues or event.[4] Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their seminal research found that news content played a key role in influencing voters' perception about the 1968 presidential election.[5] Since then, this concept has been broadly examined, developed and extended in theories, methodology and application.

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[4] Maxwell E. McCombs, "Explorers and Surveys: Expanding Strategies for Agenda-Setting Research," *Journalism Quarterly* 69 (winter 1992): 813-824.

[5] Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (summer 1972): 176-184.

An agenda is commonly defined as "issues or events that are viewed at a point in time as ranked in a hierarchy of importance."[6] The broad application of the agenda-setting theory has reached over to a variety of international issues. Zucker argues that the extent of the agenda-setting influence is negatively related to the degree of issue obtrusiveness, in which the audience has trivial personal involvement and has to depend mostly on the news media for the information.[7] Based on Zucker's logic, international activities are more likely than local or national issues to be given intensive attention and have a stronger agenda-setting effect.

Nevertheless, international trade issues gain less salience because of their abstractness.[8] Yagade and Dozier indicate that concrete issues, which can be identified and experienced by individuals, have a greater agenda-setting influence upon the populace than do abstract ones. Moreover, in their examinations of "the agenda-setting effect of international news coverage," Wanta and Hu offer evidence for this assumption. Wanta and Hu conclude that the international trade problems are "abstract" and "stories... involving a trade agreement should produce weaker agenda-setting effects," because the grassroots "cannot picture in their minds billions of dollars of [the trade] debt."[9]

While researchers have shed some light on an overall agenda-setting effect of the international trade problems, many of their studies revealed loopholes in light of the varied nature of world trade activities and accompanying problems. For instance, the international trade conflicts between the United States and Japan disclose a clear and vivid picture for those out of work. The key point is that personal experience of unemployment or threat of unemployment can make such global trade issues become concrete and notable, as in American automobile trade disputes with Japan. In addition, Zucker's conception of issue obtrusiveness also contains misunderstandings as the line between national and international issues has become increasingly blurred.

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[6] Everett M. Roger and James W. Dearing, "Agenda-Setting Research: Where has it been and where is it going?" in *Media Power in Politics*, ed. Doris A. Graber (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 1994), 78.

[7] Harold G. Zucker, "The Variable Nature of News Media Influence," in *Communication Yearbook* 2, ed. B.D. Ruben (New Transaction, 1978), 225-240.

[8] Aileen Yagade and David Dozier, "The Media Agenda-Setting Effect of Concrete Versus Abstract Issue," *Journalism Quarterly* 67 (spring 1990): 3-10.

[9] Wayne Wanta and Yu-Wei Hu, "The Agenda-Setting Effects of International News Coverage: An Examination of Differing News Frames," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 3 (fall 1993): 253.

Furthermore, most researchers seem to overlook or fail to discuss the potential contradictions between the concepts of issue obtrusiveness and concreteness, which are negatively correlated—the more obtrusive, the less effective, while the more concrete, the more effective in agenda-setting. Personal involvement or experience ostensibly can be regarded as the key for both concepts to the intensity of the agenda-setting effect by the news media. The fundamental problem is, however, that for an event or issue to be concrete, it is also very likely to be tangible or at least sensible by personal experience. In other words, a concrete issue can also be a local issue, and vice versa. Take the U.S.-Japan automobile trade issue. The employment in Detroit or even in the whole State of Michigan has been significantly influenced by the auto industry. The issue understandably is concrete, yet also local.

Thus logically, an international trade conflict that can be very concrete, as the thesis under discussion, can be both obtrusive or less salient in effect (as it converts into a local issue), and concrete or significant in effect (as more people are personally facing the threat of layoff or economic security). Accordingly, the reasoning by Zucker and some researchers can be mistaken because they seem to see the international trade issues and problems possessing only the characteristic of concreteness, and not of obtrusiveness.

Fortunately, this problematic contradiction has been recognized and explained by such scholars as Lasorsa and Wanta. Rejecting their own hypothesis, Lasorsa and Wanta conclude that "personal experience was a positive influence on media agenda conformity:

the more a person was personally involved in an issue, the more likely he or she was to conform to the news media agenda," and therefore the agenda-setting effect is stronger.[10] Their conclusions are also echoed by other agenda-setting researchers. Iyengar and Kinder, as well as Erbring and associates, all argue those with highly personal involvement in issues are more likely to sensitize themselves than others to the media's agenda.[11]

Who Sets the Media's Agenda?

The intriguing nature of the international trade issues makes more important the question: Who sets the media's agenda? According to Zhu, it is the interest group. In his five-component "public agenda" study, Zhu ranks first the interest group's agenda, followed by the media agenda, audience members' agenda, policymakers' agenda, and policy agenda.[12] He writes:

> Those components play different roles in the formation of public agenda. Interest groups initially identify, define and raise social issues. Therefore, their agenda is the source of the public agenda. The media select, redefine and amplify some of the interest group issues, with both ordinary citizens and policymakers as the target. In this sense, the media are instrumental.[13]

Moreover, many other researchers have also found that the press often serves as supporters and advocates of the government and its foreign policy. For instance, Chang demonstrates that the government has an upper hand in shaping and directing the public agenda and opinion concerning foreign policies.[14] In his content-analysis study of the press' role in Sino-America foreign policy, Chang concludes that the press is inclined to be pro-government and basically follows the government's position for its direction of news coverage, and thereby influences public opinion.[15] Chang's and Zhu's arguments are echoed by Shoemaker and Reese's concept of "hierarchy of influence"[16] topped by the societal ideology and followed by special groups, the news media, the influence of news definitions and the individual at the bottom.

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[10] Dominic L. Lasorsa and Wayne Wanta, "Effects of Personal, Interpersonal and Media Experience on Issue Salience," *Journalism Quarterly* 67 (summer 1990): 812.

[11] S. Iyengar and D. Kinder, "More Than Meets the Eye: Television News, Priming, and Public Evaluation of the President," in *Public Communication and Behavior*, ed. G. Comstock (New York: Academic Press, 1985).

[12] Jian-Hua Zhu, "Issue Competition and Attention Distraction: A Zero-Sum Theory of Agenda-Setting," *Journalism Quarterly* 69 (winter 1992): 825-836.

[13] Zhu, "Issue Competition," 826.

Furthermore, press supports of foreign policy are even more prominent when its government is in national emergencies or in stalemates with foreign states.[17] Such a "rally around the flag" effect has been evidenced by some studies that concluded that the press was more likely to be either supportive or uncritical of the government's foreign actions during the crises.[18]

In their study of press coverage of the U.S. invasion of Panama, Gutierrez-Villalobos and associates concluded that *Time* and *Newsweek* as mainstream news organizations deferred to "authority in the area of foreign affair news."[19] Likewise, in their investigation of so-called CNN-effect on U.S.-Somalia foreign policy, Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus stated that "because news agendas typically reflect the agendas of officials, the media serve as instruments of those officials who are most adept at using news to further their policy goals."[20] More critical than the news- media-as-instruments model is Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model in which they integrate concepts of instrumental influence and political economy to scrutinize the cozy tie between the media and news sources. The news organizations, they claim, are servants to the influential who have the ultimate power in shaping the foreign policy.[21]

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[14] Tsan-Kuo Chang, *The Press and China Policy: The Illusion of Sino-American Relations 1950-1984* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1993).

[15] Chang, *The Press and China Policy*.

[16] P.J. Shoemaker and S.D. Reese, "The Influence of Ideology," *Mediating the Messages: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (N.Y.: Longman, 1991), 221-251.

[17] John Zaller and Dennis Chiu, "Government's little helper: U.S. press coverage of foreign policy crises, 1945-1991," *Political Communication* 13 (Oct.-Dec., 1996): 385-405.

[18] James McCartney, "Rallying around the flag," *American Journalism* Review 16 (Sept. 1994): 40-46.

[19] Sonia Gutierrez-Villalobos, James K. Hertog, and Ramona R. Rush, "Press Support for the U.S. Administration During the Panama Invasion: Analyses of Strategic and Tactical Critique in the Domestic Press," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (autumn 1994): 625.

Source-Dependence Concept

The relationship of the news media and sources has also been examined by other researchers such as Leon V. Sigal, Shoemaker and Reese, and Judy VanSlyke Turk. In his seminal study, Sigal found more than two decades ago that the news media over-relied on governmental officials through routine channels, which include official proceedings, press releases, press conferences and speeches.[22] In his content analysis of *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, Sigal concluded that U.S. (federal) government officials, particularly at the executive branch, predominate as the prime sources of information for the news media.[23] He also observed that U.S. Congressmen had gained an increasing role as news sources over the past decades. Sigal stated "Legislators in pivotal positions in Congress have become more adept at disseminating information to the press."[24]

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[20] Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, "Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered," *Political Communication* 12 (Oct.-Dec., 1995): 427.

[21] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[22] Leon V. Sigal, "Channels and Sources of News," in *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 119-130.

[23] Sigal, "Channels and Sources of News," 119-130.

[24] Sigal., "Channels and Sources of News," 127.

In their investigation of influence on the media content, Shoemaker and Reese explicitly pinpoint and depict the relationship between the news sources and the media. They argue, above all, that "sources have a tremendous effect on mass media content, because journalists can't include in their news reports what they don't know."[25] Concurring with Sigal's observations, Shoemaker and Reese say that government officials are heavily relied on by the news media for information due to their availability, authority and credibility. In addition, they find that powerful and resourceful interest groups tend to directly influence or control media's content by ways of routine conduits such as press releases and public relations campaigns.[26]

Furthermore, at the local level, Weaver and Elliott, in their study of the source-media kinship, find that local newspapers tend to serve as a "transmitter" rather than a "filter," or agenda-setter, as they fundamentally follow and reflect "the priorities of the city council on major items."[27] And such a role by the press is more prominent on economic topics that are considered by journalists to be policy matters and require political decisions.[28] Similarly, Turk, who investigates the impact of public information officials [PIOs] as news sources upon the local papers' news content, points out that: "...the [local government officials as] sources of the raw material of information upon which journalists rely may ultimately have as much to do with the media's agenda..."[29] The newspapers, Turk argues, rely heavily upon the PIOs, who offer newsworthy information and set the media's agenda. One notable point revealed in both Weaver's and VanSlyke Turk's research is that local newspapers are highly susceptible to the agenda of local sources on economic issue. This notion is very important because the local economy often is tied to the international trade activities of the local enterprises. More relevant to this study is Erwin Atwood's research on how the U.S. and the Japanese newspapers portray each other in their news coverage. Atwood argues that foreign correspondents were inclined to reflect the opinions of the foreign nation participating in an international trade issue.[30]

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[25] Shoemaker and Reese, "Influence on Content from Outside of Media Organizations," 178.

[26] Shoemaker and Reese, "Influence on Content from Outside of Media Organizations," 175-220.

[27] David Weaver and Swanzy Nimley Elliott, "Who Sets the Agenda for the Media? A Study of Local Agenda-Building," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (spring 1985): 91.

[28] Weaver and Elliott, "Who Sets the Agenda for the Media," 87-94.

[29] Judy VanSlyke Turk, "Public Relations' Influence on the News," *Newspaper Research Journal* 7 (summer 1986): 15.

Hypotheses

The political economic literature shows that the free trade concept is deemed a byproduct of global trade policy and an instrument of global hegemony, and conception of elite ideology is the foremost societal ideology, which tops the "hierarchy of influence." It is thus not difficult to understand that commercial policy can be highly directed and controlled by the elite group and prominent multinational enterprises, such as the American Big Three—General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. They are believed to have the clout to set the policy and media's agenda.

H1: The American Big Three automakers set the automobile trade policy agenda for the newspapers examined.

Rationale: Automakers as a powerful interest group shape the societal ideology and set the agenda for the news media as an agent of the powerful.

H2: *The New York Times* and the *Detroit News* are more likely to have their coverage biased toward fair trade policy.

Rationale: American automakers, believed to have the power to influence both the media agenda and policy agenda, are facing a tough time in the global competition and are in favor of fair trade policy in order to protect the domestic market and open the Japanese auto market.

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[30] L. Erwin Atwood, "News of U.S. and Japan in each other's papers," *Gazette* 39 (1987): 73-89.

H3: A newspaper published in the automobile industry center (the *Detroit News*) Is more likely than a national newspaper (*The New York Times*) to have more coverage of fair trade than free trade when the issue was highly developed (period two) than when it was in the early stage (period one).

Rationale: In Detroit, automobile workers' personal experience of layoff or threat of unemployment make them more susceptible to the content of the newspaper, whose agenda is set by the automakers, along with government officials who include U.S. Congressmen from Michigan, as the major news sources.

Methods

Content analysis was employed for this research based on a longitudinal method, which enables the researcher to investigate the agenda-setting effects over time. This study examined the news content of the U.S.-Japan automobile trade conflicts from 1981 through 1995 (See Appendix 1), as the U.S. auto industry and the economy as a whole had plummeted into a huge slump and the trade confrontation reached its peak. Public polls concerning the possible long-term influence of trade barriers upon the U.S. economy and well-being were first conducted and reported in 1983 by *The Los Angeles Times*. Major sequential polls on the issue of trade policy were completed by *The Los Angeles Times*, *Gallup Poll Monthly*, the *Washington Post*/ABC and the *Public Perspective* in 1985, 1992, 1993, 1995, respectively.

Research Sample and Population

The *Detroit News* and *The New York Times* were chosen for analyses. Rationales for this selection include: (1) the *Times* has been considered a general and influential national elite newspaper dedicated to the coverage of both politics and economics, or the political economy; (2) the *News*, located in the center of competition and controversy of the international automobile trade, serves as the representative local daily newspaper with a considerably large circulation.

Because the automobile trade conflict was both a domestic/local and an international issue, the population of the content analysis was defined as encompassing stories on the front pages, international pages, editorial pages and business pages. Selected and sampled stories were from the period of automobile trade negotiations between the two countries each year. More specifically, the study covered a 14-day[31] time span within which trade talks were held.

This study included only the news covered in both newspapers for each trade talk. In addition, this investigation encompassed news content directly aimed at or closely related to bilateral automobile trade negotiations between the United States and Japan. For example, the news content for the Framework (for a New Economic Partnership) talks was included in the sample, whereas content for the Structural Impediment Initiatives (SII) was not, because auto trade talks were not listed as the major part of its agenda.

This study divided the 15-year time span into two periods, each with four years. Period one included years 1981, 1983, 1985 and 1986; period two 1992-1995. The main rationale for this design is that a natural time block, from 1987 through 1991 during which no trade negotiations were held or reported in both newspapers, helped divide the time span into two periods that allowed the longitudinal method. In addition, 1992 was the first auto trade talk ever conducted in an election year during Reagan/Bush regimes. The auto trade conflict was highly developed and became an issue in the presidential campaign and dominated the trade agenda in the Clinton administration, and there existed a great disparity in intensity of the trade confrontation.

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[31] In very rare cases, the time span extended to 15 days, if the first day or last day of that month is the 15th day of the span. For instance, June 16 1995 through June 30 1995, a 15-day span, was selected for the analysis.

Totally, 325 news items that included 240 news stories and 85 editorial pages were selected. *The New York Times* had 133 (46 in time one/87 in time two) news articles and 36 (10/26) editorial pieces, while the *Detroit News* had 107 (26/81) stories and 49 (10/39) editorial pages. Those editorial pages included editorials, commentaries, letters to the editor, political cartoons and advertising campaigns.

In addition to the press content, three other primary sources of data were used in this study: government documents, public polls, and news releases and speeches. They were employed to help analyze the existence, intensity or influences of the agenda-setting mechanism. The news releases issued by the automobile leaders and related organizations such as the UAW (United Automobile Workers) and AMC (American Motors Corporation), the government data such as presidential documents and congressional-hearing records, and the public polling conducted by newspapers or poll institutions helped identify, through the source-dependency theory and descriptive path analysis, the directions of message flow and agenda-setting effects among the participants involved in this issue.

Unit of Analysis

Paragraphs were determined to be the unit of coding and analysis for the regular news articles sampled. Major independent variable included (1) the sources of free or fair trade policy; (2) types of the news channels; (3) the themes or symbols of either trade policy; (4) other nations or regions mentioned in either trade policy; (5) attitudes toward either trade policy; (6) attitudes toward the role of world trade organizations. The dependent variable is the overall trade policy.

The identifications of the news sources helped determine the participants in the formation of the agenda and trade policy. Major sources of news in the newspapers that were studied encompassed news releases via news wire services, such as PR Newswire and Businesswire, letters to the editor, public announcements, auto firms' annual reports, congressional-hearing records and the State of the Union addresses.

The themes/symbols and the news sources were used as the operational definitions of the free or fair trade concepts generated by heightened debates over the issue. Another major variable was the attitude or opinion of the newspapers toward the trade policy. Attitude is defined as a response, either favorable or positive, or unfavorable or negative, to free or fair trade policy.

The Power Index of Fairness

To make the measurement more accurate and meaningful, however, a power or strength index of fairness was created because the themes or sources had varying degrees of power or effort in formatting or advocating the concept of fair trade/fairness in the issue under discussion. The literature and related preliminary research disclosed that there existed different degrees of advocacy for fair trade within and among varying clans of participants in this issue. The higher the indexed number was, the stronger the concept of fairness or fair trade was promoted. A sub-category was not created for the concept of free trade because free trade is simply supposed to be free, as revealed in the literature review, and accordingly its corresponding power index was a fixed (1).

Construction and Measurement of the News Content

The content of the news stories was simply divided into three categories: free trade, fair trade and neutral. The addition of a "neutral" category resulted from the pre-tests, in which some irrelevant or neutral paragraphs concerning discussions, such as the name list of the trade-talk participants, were in the news. The dependent variable, the measurement of tendency of news coverage toward free trade or fair trade policy, was determined by the ratio of the overall trade policy, using the power index, rather than totaling the number of paragraphs that indicated either policy.

The trade policy ratio was designed to test H2 that both newspapers coverage leaned toward fair trade. Defined as the *news agenda* adopted by the newspapers, ***Trade Policy = Fair Trade/Free Trade***.

Using the ratio is rational because it can easily determine the trade policy by simply looking at if the ratio is greater or smaller than 1. The "1" serves as the break-even point and indicates the objectivity of the news coverage. And when the ratio is greater than 1, it means the news coverage was biased toward fair trade; when smaller than 1, free trade. The bigger the ratio, the greater the intensity of fair trade policy, and the smaller the ratio (but always bigger than zero and smaller than one), the greater the intensity of free trade policy. The intercoder reliability was 90.7 percent, using the Holsti formula.

The Big Three as the Agenda-Setters

The researcher employed qualitative, descriptive content analysis based on the source dependence theory and path analysis to test this foremost hypothesis. According to Judith Hoover, former Chrysler Corp. President Lee Iacocca framed and then further set the fair-trade policy agenda for the nation as a whole. It was thus essential to trace and capture how-the fair trade concept was originated and transmitted among the key players involved in this issue, just as it was helpful to identify and disclose how the newspapers selected and cited their news sources. A comprehensive scrutiny of public documents reconfirming Hoover's observations unveiled that Iacocca, with two other auto industry leaders, set the agenda since the early stage for the U.S. Congress, the presidents and the news media. Iacocca set the fair-trade policy agenda for Reagan's regime.

The term of "fair trade" was recorded for the first time in the presidential documents on the November 7, 1983, before President Reagan's trip to Japan. Reagan said, "I think, for one thing, we have some differences with regard to trade... The great growth and prosperity of

Japan in trade and industry is due to the idea of democracy and free trade. And so free trade must also be ***fair trade***... And there is a dangerous imbalance now in that trade."[32]

In subsequent public speeches, Reagan had adopted and promoted the themes of fair trade advocated by the American Big Three and related interest groups. Reagan often mentioned themes such as job creations, trade barriers, trade deficits, breathing room and market access, among others.[33] Moreover, even before adopting the *fair trade* concept, Reagan had willy-nilly adapted himself to gradually become sympathetic to the sobering auto industry. More importantly, the influences of auto elite on the Reagan administration was greatly evinced in his remarks on this issue in his 1982 State of the Union Address. On the very top of his agendas, Reagan stated, "Seldom have the stakes been higher for America. What we do and say here will make all the difference to automakers in Detroit... who are in the unemployment lines."[34]

Although President Bush adopted a similar moderate approach to the automobile trade issue, Clinton is much more aggressive in his stand, which eventually resulted in the 1995 chaotic auto trade negotiation. Clinton's true belief in the fair trade concept can be dated at least as early as 1987 while he was governor of Arkansas. Clinton was "shot early"[35] when he was attending a National Governors Association Conference in Michigan where Lee Iacocca presented a speech on the automobile trade issue and policy; since then,

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[32] President, Remarks in an Interview with Nobutaka Shikanai of Fuji Television in the White House, *The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 19 (14 November, 1983): 1539.

[33] In many other remarks recorded in the presidential documents, Presidents expressed those fair trade themes. For instance, Remarks in a question-and-answer session during a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Teleconference, May 10, 1983; Proclamation 5160 at the World Trade Week, 1984, March 15, 1984; Remarks at the Ford Claycomo Assembly Plant in Kansas City, Missouri, April 11, 1984; Remarks at the Awards Presentation Ceremony, May 23, 1984.

[34] President, The State of the Union, *The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Document*, vol. 18, no. 4 (7 February, 1982): 76.

[35] Lee Iacocca said that "For of all, there's a good chance that someone in this room may be a future president of the United States, and I wanted a shot at him early." Lee Iacocca, "Remarks at the National Governors Association Conference," in *"I gotta tell you,"* ed. Mattew W. Seeger (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 228.

Clinton seemed to have been greatly influenced. And apparently, as the governor of one of the poorest states in the U.S., Clinton was more susceptible to Iacocca's speech concerning unemployment and trade deficit.

The Big Three, UAW and Jobs

As early as 1979, when Iacocca sought financial grants from the public and private sectors to salvage the dying company, he persistently singled out and attacked Japan for its unfair advantages in the global automobile competition.

Iacocca was successful back in 1980 in imposing the fair-trade concept and agenda upon the United Automobile Workers composed of more than 1.5 million members, and on other related automotive groups by his continuous stressing of the Japanese import threats to their own economic welfare or job security. Also, Iacocca used the annual shareholders meetings and annual reports as the conduits to spread the fair trade/fairness ideas to the public.

The Big Three and the U.S. Congress

While Lee Iacocca, among all automobile elite, shaped the fair-trade concept in the mind of the government, the public and other automotive organizations, he also set the agenda for congressmen. In addition to their direct efforts through testimony at congressional hearings in both houses, auto elite urged and led the public and auto workers, employed and unemployed alike, to seek assistance and relief from their constituents. Notably in almost all hearings, there were congressmen from Michigan, notably the Levin brothers and Donald Riegle, either serving as the chairmen or simply presenting their views. The agenda-setting for fair trade with representatives was illustrated by their reactions to prominently display Iacocca's testimony. Rep. Carl Levin said, "All the problems facing the industry have been made more critical by the flow of imports [by the Japanese] into this country... It is clear that we ought to take action now to facilitate a process which will produce that restraint"[36] on Japan. Beyond that, UAW chairmen and other automotive interest groups often personally testified at or submitted their opinions to congressional hearings.

The Big Three and the News Media

It is possible to investigate who sets the news media's agenda, using the source dependency, by examining how the newspapers cited or quoted their selected news sources. Among them were the auto elite and related interest groups, congressmen, and the presidents and their officials. The selective findings from *The New York Times* and the *Detroit News* were listed for the critical years of 1981, 1983, 1992 and 1995, during which the trade conflicts and negotiations were most notable for each period.[37]

The descriptive content analyses unveiled some interesting varying citation patterns by *The New York Times* and the *Detroit News*. First of all, while the *Times* seemed more likely to quote, in tendency and frequency, government officials, particularly in the second period, he *News* persistently quoted more auto elite and automotive interest groups than government officials mostly congressmen from Michigan in the same period.

For instance, on May 2, 1981, whereas both papers quoted virtually the same sources, the *News* used stronger expressions that showed more intense emotions in the news coverage. Lee Iacocca, former UAW chairman Douglas Fraser and Congressmen such as Carl Levin, among others, voiced their anger at or disappointment of the insignificant automobile trade agreement reached by the Reagan government and his counterpart. In addition, they expressed their concerns about the Japanese commitment and faith in fulfilling the agreement. They also complained that while the trade pact might help the U.S. Big Three protect some American domestic auto and auto parts market, it was far from solving such fundamental problems as huge unemployment in the auto industry.

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[36] Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Auto Situation, Autumn 1980: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 96th Cong. 2nd sess., 18 November, 1980, 16-17.

[37] The first ever bilateral trade negotiation for the voluntary export restraints was held in 1981 and settled by the United States. In 1983, public opinion poll on the trade issue and conflict was for the first time conducted by the news media (*The Los Angeles Times*). 1992 represented the increased clout of auto elite, who accompanied President Bush to Japan on the highly regarded auto trade mission. 1995 showcased the prominence of this trade issue as the accompanying disputes reached its peak.

On Nov. 2, 1983, in their coverage of the auto trade negotiation on the VER renewal, both newspapers again relied on and quoted heavily the auto elite, particularly Lee Iacocca and other related interest groups. They slashed that the renewed VER would create many negative effects on the industry, auto workers and the whole economy, as a result of the unfair trade practices by the Japanese automakers. Lee Iacocca, for instance, said, "**MAKE NO MISTAKE**, this 'transitional agreement' is a serious blow to the U.S. auto producers, suppliers, dealers, their employees and laid-off workers who are being hurt by the unfair advantages enjoyed by the Japanese auto industry - and whose problems were not corrected by these negotiations" [emphasis in original.]

This issue turned more intense and controversial as it moved into the second period. News sources or themes such as trade war, trade deficit, market share, market openness and import target have been cited or quoted by the two newspapers more frequently. The *Detroit News* continued to rely more on the auto elite as the primary news sources, whereas *The New York Times* still used government official as the major sources. Moreover, when related interest groups and Congressmen are considered, the disparity in the citation frequency between the two newspapers becomes much greater. More importantly, those themes used by the auto elite have also been adopted by government officials as news sources that further passed them on to the news media covering the story. Bush and Clinton and their trade representatives all mentioned and stressed such themes as unemployment, trade deficit, trade barriers/ Keiretsu, market openness, market share, import target as well as trade retaliation.

Fair Trade, not Free Trade

H2 was supported: The newspapers analyzed are more likely to have their news coverage biased toward fair trade. The trade-policy ratio (= Fair/Free) for both newspapers in both periods were significantly grater than 1. The mean score for *The New York Times* were 5.6838 and 4.0647 for period one and two, whereas the score for the *Detroit News* were 5.1907 and 6.1101 (See Table 1).

H3 was also supported: A newspaper published in the automobile industry center (*the Detroit News*) is more likely than a national newspaper *(The New York Times)* to have more coverage of fair trade when the issue was highly developed (period two) than when the issue was in the early stage (period one). For the first period, the ratio mean score for *The New York Times* and the *Detroit News* were 5.6838 and 5.1907, respectively. The t-value was 0.36, p=.3595 (one-tailed), which showed no significant difference between these two newspapers in their coverage of and attitude toward the automobile trade issue in the first period. Nevertheless, the two papers did have significant differences in their attitude in the second period. The mean difference was -2.0454, t-value was -2.13, the one-tailed **p= .0175**, and df= 166 (See Table 1).

There were a combined 85 editorial items for both newspapers. *The New York Times* published 10 and 26 editorial items in the first and second period, while the *Detroit News* ran 10 and 39 items in the two periods. In the breakdown, the *Times* had four editorials, four commentaries and three letters to the editors in the first period; six editorials, 12 commentaries, six letters and two advertising campaigns in the second period. The *News*, on the other hand, offered three editorials, three commentaries, two letters and two political cartoons in the first period; nine editorials, 18 commentaries, nine letters to the editor and three cartoons in the second period.

Chi-square test for these nominal-variable editorial items indicated no difference between the two newspapers' attitude toward the trade conflicts in both periods. The test likewise showed that each paper statistically possessed no preference for either free or fair trade policy. In period one, the chi-square values were 1.6000 for the *Times* and .4000 for the *News*, respectively. Mathematically, the *Times* had seven editorial items for free trade vs. three for fair trade; the *News* offered six for free trade vs. four for fair trade. In period two, the chi-square values were .1538 for the *Times* and .2308 for the *News*. The *Times* devoted 12 items to free trade vs. 14 to fair trade; the *News* provided 18 for free trade vs. 21 for fair trade.

Discussion and Conclusion

As analyzed above, the auto elite set the fair-trade agenda for the two newspapers. Clearly, the auto elite framed the fair trade concept and related sub-concepts, used them in testimony before Congress, influenced the presidents and trade representatives to adopt the terms, which then were picked up by the news media. More specifically, the newspapers relied on the auto elite as a powerful interest group who set the media's agenda en route of hearings, news releases, speeches and interviews, advertising campaigns and even public relations issued or conducted from Detroit or their Washington offices.

The New York Times and the *Detroit News* also depend considerably on government sources serving in the U.S. or overseas, notably the presidents, U.S. trade representatives and U.S. ambassadors to Japan, for information of the trade negotiations through similar routines used by the auto elite. Therefore, the first and most important hypothesis for this study is supported. The automobile elite set the fair trade agenda for the news media analyzed through their routine news practices by ways of news sources selections and reliance.

The quantitative findings reconfirm and reject previous agenda-setting research in subtle ways. This study foremost supports Zhu's idea that influential interest groups such as the auto elite set the media's agenda because of their ability to "initially identify, define and raise social issues"[38] with the news media as their instruments. Moreover, this research also confirms Chang's and other scholars' argument that the press is more likely to be in favor of the government policy, as in the international trade policy. Furthermore, these findings also agree with Weaver and Elliott's conclusion that the local newspapers are inclined to serve as transmitters of their news sources, executives of the Big Three, who set the agenda for the media.

However, while this study supports Shoemaker and Reese's notion that the societal ideology tops the "hierarchy of influence," it refutes their assumption that free market and laissez-faire economic system are fundamental to the U.S. societal ideology and belief system. Examples of governmental intervention or regulations of economic activities and practices abound. Likewise, these findings also support Altschull's argument that the news media are the agents of powers such as Lee Iacocca.

More importantly, previous research argues that international trade issues are not concrete because the grassroots cannot picture the astronomic trade deficit. However, it is very likely that such issues become very concrete because individuals can picture the misery of jobless, when "billions of trade deficit" is transformed into and equated with losses of "hundreds of thousands of jobs." Based on the logic, the findings hint that international trade issues can be concrete and thus have a stronger agenda-setting effect.

This research hypothesized and supported (1) that the American Big Three set the news media's agenda; (2) that the newspapers were more likely to have their coverage biased toward fair trade; and (3) that a local newspaper published in the auto industry center (the *Detroit News*) was more likely than a national paper (*The New York Times*) to have more coverage of fair trade when the issue was highly developed than when it was in the early stage.

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[38] Zhu, "Issue Competition," 826.

The findings disclosed that in the early development of the trade conflict, the auto elite, notably Lee Iacocca, set the fair-trade agenda for the presidents, U.S. Congress and the public. And through them as agents, the news media adopted the fair-trade agenda and policy via their selection of news sources by ways of routine and other news channels

This research offers an alternative explanation to the inconclusive question: Who sets the media's agenda? The auto industry elite as a powerful interest group that shapes ad hoc societal ideology set the agenda for the news media that are highly susceptible to economic forces.

Table 1: T-Test Outcomes for Agenda-Setting Effect Measures

(Period One)

Newspaper	# of Cases	Mean	T-value	Probability
			.35	.3595
New York Times	46	5.6838		
Detroit News	26	5.1907		

(Period Two)

Newspaper	# of Cases	Mean	T-value	Probability
			-2.13	**.0175**
New York Times	87	4.0647		
Detroit News	81	6.1101		

Australian newspaper gatekeepers: their use of readership research

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Australian newspaper gatekeepers: their use of readership research

Abstract

Australian gatekeepers enjoy limited use of readership research. Despite considerable research being done at the nation's major newspapers, gatekeepers report limited access to the research but strong interest in using it. The gatekeepers take a conservative approach to the news agenda and favour following the agenda, deferring to audience preferences, rather than setting the agenda.

AUSTRALIAN newspapers, like newspapers around the world, are struggling to reverse a national trend towards lower circulation. The Australian industry journal PANPA Bulletin notes in its March 1998 issue that only two capital city newspapers lifted their readership reach in the final quarter of last year, compared with the same period for the previous year (PANPA Bulletin, 52). The same issue notes (11-12) that the latest Audit Bureau of Circulation figures register flat circulation for mid-week papers and small gains for weekend sales. The journal refers to the latest figures as "reassuring" because they are seen to arrest a 10-year decline in circulation during a time of population growth. The journal also notes (11):

> Despite the positive results, marketing departments remain concerned about the softness of weekday sales. Circulation during the last six months of 1997 benefited from several major news stories, including the death and funeral of Princess Di, the Thredbo disaster and the death of Michael Hutchence.

Australian newspaper gatekeepers: their use of readership research

Introduction

Australian newspapers, like news organisations around the world, are battling unsatisfactory circulation/readership situations. For metropolitan daily newspapers, circulations have been declining for decades and marketing pushes have at best produced slight improvements. Even where circulations have in some cases risen, they in fact represent a relative decline because the increases are far outstripped by population growth. In rural areas the situation is even worse, with circulation declines exacerbated by population drift to metropolitan centres.

Australian newspapers have tried to address the circulation problem in a number of ways – promotions, competitions and discounted sales to schools are three strategies relied upon. But Australian newspapers are also asking the big question – why are Australians exhibiting declining interest in their newspapers?

This paper looks at the ways in which the newspaper Australian industry is grappling with circulation decreases and specifically at the extent and the ways it uses readership research to understand the problem. The paper stems from a hypothesis, based on the researcher's 30 years in the print media industry, that application of readership research is poorly understood and communicated patchily in newsrooms.

Literature review

A number of studies over the years have focussed on readers' motivations for picking up a newspaper and on the characteristics which define a newspaper reader. Many of the studies have discussed their findings in terms of customer or community orientation, with most researchers acknowledging people who feel "connected" to their communities—that is, have a sense of being settled and belonging—are more likely to be newspaper readers than those who have a weak sense of affiliation with a community. The studies often diverge at this point, however, with some recommending newspapers should give readers what they say they want (customer orientation), while others say the papers should find out what a community's needs and interests are, and take a lead in agenda-setting for those interest areas (community orientation). While 1980s pragmatism continued into the 90s, with some newspaper proprietors aiming for what has been termed "fast-food newspapers", the community-orientation, which tends to recommend a more analytical and/or in-depth approach to content, also is alive and well. Many of the following studies reflect the dual development.

The Boca Raton experiment refers to the decision by the Knight-Ridder chain to remake The News in Boca Raton "to appeal to the baby boom generation, the 78 million Americans born between 1946 and 64" (Hartman, 1993, 5). The result was a paper which "emerged looking like a localised version of the Gannett Co.'s national daily, USA

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Today" (Hartman, 5). But it also was accused by a number of commentators of taking the customer-oriented newspaper to the "fast food" level, in that the content was market-driven not only in terms of subject matter but also in its form—short, bright items, lots of graphics, with little in-depth reporting or analysis. Hartman notes Knight-Ridder "upped the ante in the research and development race by creating the Information Design Lab in Boulder, Colo., under the leadership of editor, designer and newspaper futurist Roger Fidler" (5).

Paula Poindexter (1979), in examining why non-readers are non-readers, acknowledges that newspaper readers are more likely to be "community-connected". But she discovers two distinct groups of non-readers—typical and atypical. The typical non-readers exhibit all the traditional characteristics: they are young or old, poor and under-educated. But the atypical non-readers have high incomes, are educated and come from the middle class: the characteristics researchers predict would place them in the ranks of readers. Poindexter discovered the atypical non-readers cited lack of time, and quality of newspaper content, as the major reasons for not reading. She points out newspapers need to persuade this group to make time, and with digests and indexes they are already trying to address the problem. There is little they can do about the content, she says, because of the danger of alienating committed readers through content changes.

Two years later, Sobal and Jackson-Beeck confirmed the existence of atypical non-readers. Their national study showed typical non-readers to be elderly, poorly educated and disadvantaged, living in rural areas and socially isolated (13). But "there seem to be a number of types of non-readers" and therefore single-cause explanations for newspaper non-reading "often are likely to be inappropriate" (28). They conclude that as education, transport and living conditions improve in the US, some of the reasons for non-reading will disappear.

Like Poindexter, Robinson and Jeffres hold out little hope for newspaper proprietors seeking prescriptions to arrest the decline in readership. They look at five sources of US national readership data, from 1965 to 1978, and conclude the perception that readership is declining more rapidly among younger readers, perhaps because of the influence of TV, is wrong. The decline in readership was reasonably consistent across all age groups, with some evidence that "reality-oriented" (224) TV news content was seducing newspaper readers. Not only is there a decline in readership, they say, but also: "Nor do data on how people feel about newspaper reading as an activity give great hope for the future" (224). They recommend long-term panel data to trace changes in media uses and gratifications "that first build and then maintain media behavior habits" (224).

Chaffee and Choe (1981) inspect the non-reading phenomenon from a constraints point of view, listing three barriers to newspaper reading: structural constraints like poverty; transitional constraints like lifestyle changes; and self constraints like political activity. They point out that each constraint is not "an independent variable contributing to a unidimensional dependent variable, newspaper reading" (203), but that they are interrelated.

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In a conclusion which must worry the newspaper industry, they conclude that lost readership is not directly attributable to newspapers themselves and that readership status may be constrained by factors beyond the control of the individual or newspapers themselves, with social change looming as an important factor. They point out that new generations are "distinctly less likely than their predecessors to adopt newspaper reading as part of their daily life" (211).

Underwood and Stamm (1992) basically deal with the growing business pragmatism in US west coast newspapers facing declining circulations. They say one response was to tighten costs and marginalise the product, producing a generation of disillusioned journalists. But another response was to become more market-driven, listening to what readers said they wanted. Their survey of journalists showed many believed their papers had changed for the better as a result. Underwood and Stamm refer to the change as "customer-oriented" journalism, but they do not define the term or what the changes in content are.

The customer-oriented approach to readership is an approach which seems to be becoming more prevalent. Bridges, in a 1991 survey of 111 managing editors of US dailies, discovered a "manager" type profile, "a reader-oriented businessperson" who would become the editor of the future—a future which would require less emphasis on craft-oriented concerns and more emphasis on marketing concerns, including readership research.

In 1982, Stamm had begun to look at the connection between community-orientation and newspaper subscription (Stamm and Weis, 1982) as part of what he called a "dynamic approach to explaining newspaper subscribing". The study supported the authors' contention (they did not frame hypotheses) that subscription behavior was related to lifetime transitions, such as settling into a new community.

While Stamm moved away from community-oriented readership approaches to customer-oriented theories, Michael Hoyt (1992) looked at community-oriented journalism as practised by the Wichita Eagle in Ohio. The Eagle's editor, Davis "Buzz" Merritt, Jr. described the Eagle as "a newspaper in search of an agenda". The Eagle's approach differs in that it spent three years in extensive focus group readership research, asking community members what the important issues were in the community—and not what the issues were that they wanted to see in the paper. Then consultants and the paper's own research department set out to identify patterns which would allow it to set the news agenda. As an example, during a state election the newspaper refused to accept the slick, packaged campaigns of the major candidates and insisted its reporters press for answers to questions the paper's research showed should be on the agenda. When candidates could not or would not respond, reporters were under orders to report the fact. Hoyt quotes Merritt (46):

> One of the things we've discovered is that it's okay to have an attitude in the news columns. People want to resonate with an institution like a newspaper. If they don't share some values with you, how can they? You can't go too far down that road, but you can do certain things.

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In terms of this study into Australian metro newspapers' attitudes towards research, the Hoyt study seems to indicate a far greater awareness of the need to connect with the community outside the immediate readership and to take a lead in setting the agenda while keeping the community's interests in mind.

Laurence Lain's study (1986) into the factors behind newspaper readership also concludes community integration is an important element of the propensity to read newspapers. In a study which uses factor analysis, multiple regression analysis and multiple discriminant analysis to identify what it is that adult residents of Montgomery County, Ohio, want to see in their papers, he says (73):

> Persons who were older, better educated, are more highly integrated into the community and had a higher surveillance need were those most likely to read a newspaper—and the US population is getting older and better educated, which would seem to offer encouragement to newspapers.

Lain classified readers' interests according to three factors: 1. surveillance (the need to keep up with events); 2. companionship (the need to overcome loneliness and to fill in time; 3. stimulation (the need for current events information ... [and] dramatic, exciting things)...(71). Further analysis showed four variables—age, surveillance need, community integration and education—as providing the best predictors of newspaper readership. Lain sees the surveillance variable as holding the key to readership potential and, given that this seems to contain factors which fit in the "hard news" category, this conclusion merely reinforces what other studies have already shown.

Payne, Severn and Dozier used readership measures of surveillance, interaction and diversion to isolate uses and gratifications motives for readership, employing factor analysis, discriminant analysis and ANOVA techniques when inspecting a trade magazine and a consumer magazine. They conclude "that uses of particular media types can be predicted from the content of a medium", that diversion is a strong use motive for use of consumer magazines, and that the surveillance, interaction and diversion typology can be extended to trade magazines.

Weaver and Mauro (1978) also use factor analysis to examine patterns of reading among men and women. They study 220 men and 232 women readers of the Tampa Tribune, examining the patterns from two perspectives—content category (business, accidents and crimes, government...) and newspaper material category (straight news, features, columns...). They conclude (91):

> ...the results of these factor analyses seem to indicate that men and women generally prefer the same groupings of subject-matter content within newspapers, but they do not prefer the same kinds of newspaper material for getting at this subject matter.

The divergence in newspaper material readership occurs because men prefer straight news articles, followed by editorials and columns, features and entertainment items; women prefer "evaluational material (editorials and columns), followed by entertainment items, and then straight news items and listings" (91). Because of this divergence, Weaver and Mauro highlight the importance of analysing readership from both content

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- category and material category perspectives

Randal A. Beam looks at readership research by newspapers (1995) and concludes the quantity and quality of research varies considerably throughout the industry. Beams finds, inter alia, that US papers, like their Australian counterparts, tend to do more research and more different kinds of research the larger they are.
He recommends that researchers should look at "how readership research is being used if at all – to make decisions about specific kinds of content that newspaper publish, at how much the quality of research varies across organisations, at how decisions based on research translate into journalistic practice, and at how newspapers who rely heavily on research differ from those who do not.

Method

This paper is drawn from the results of a survey of 310 Australian copy-tasters at 246 Australian newspapers. The survey was designed primarily to measure the effect of readership research on the news choices made by copy-tasters, but it also was designed to reveal the scope and nature of readership research in the industry.

The study used a 105-variable questionnaire form delivered to copy-tasters by phone in the period September 1997 to March 1998. Newspapers chosen were those listed in the Margaret Gee's Australian Media Guide 53rd Edition, with circulations of more than 1000. In a number of cases, one person edited more than one title, especially with country and surburban weeklies; in those cases, only one response was included in the survey. Two of the newspapers approached declined to be included in the survey. Those interviewed were senior members of their newsrooms, ranging from managing editors to editorial department heads (features departments, sports departments, chief subs). All played gatekeeping roles in their organisations. Respondents represented metropolitan, suburban and provincial (regional daily and weekly) newspapers.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections: A. Types of research; B. Research effects on content; C. Gatekeeping; D. Implementation of research; E. Demographics. Sections A and B reflect a 1991 survey of US newspapers by Randal A. Beam (Beam 1995, 28-38), while Section E. replicates some of the areas covered by Prof John Henningham's comprehensive 1992 national survey. The resulting dataset was inspected using the SAS statistics package, employing the Frequency and General Linear Model (ANOVA) procedures.

Section A was designed to find out how conversant respondents were with the research done for their newspapers. It simply asked them about the kinds of readership research being done and how frequently it was done.

Section B asked respondents to note on a semantic differential scale the degree of their exposure to 22 categories of news research. The categories follow the 19 listed by Beam (1995, 30), with a few Australian additions. Respondents also were asked to note whether the research they had seen had influenced their treatment of specific categories of news.

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In Section C, respondents were asked to rate the importance of six factors in deciding on the newsworthiness of a potential story Journalists were asked to respond on a

semantic differential scale of one to four, where a response of 1 indicated "not important" and 4 indicated "very important" The six factors respondents were asked to rate, separately, were Journalistic experience, readership research, colleagues' opinions, feedback from readers, feedback from other departments of the paper, and what the opposition, both print and broadcast, were doing

Respondents also were asked to rank-order six groups of people in response to the question "Who knows best what should be included on the news agenda". The groups, in alphabetical order, were The audience, audience researchers, the government, journalists, other authority figures, the public in general (includes non-readers as well as readers)

Additionally, respondents were asked about their attitudes towards a newspaper's function with regard to the news agenda – should a newspaper set the news agenda, or should it follow it? The contention here is that a response in favour of setting the agenda tends to indicate an attitude of independence on the part of the gatekeeper, while a response in favour of following tends to indicate a less independent attitude.

Section D asked respondents a series of questions designed to reveal how well (or poorly) readership research findings were integrated into newsroom practice It also attempted to measure the influence of market-research "infiltration" into the newsroom, as described by Underwood (1993, Underwood)

Section E dealt with standard demographic variables

Results

The results show that Australian newspapers do readership research according to their size and financial capacity In this respect, the results reflect Beam's findings (Beam, 29) Of the 304 respondents, 144 said their papers did not conduct editorial research but a number of these acknowledged their papers benefited from research passed on by others – perhaps other papers in their ownership group, or industry representative bodies like the Country Press Association Perhaps the most reliable indicator was the figure of 111 respondents who said they had no readership research to refer to at their organisations

In general, at one end of the scale the capital city daily and Sunday newspapers conduct continuing research for their editorial departments while at the other end most country weekly newspapers not only do not conduct any detailed research of their own, but also are largely unaware of research being done by others in the industry. Where research does occur for country weekly newspapers, it is done on behalf of industry groups using national pollsters, or it is done in-house on behalf of advertising departments.

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Australian newspaper gatekeepers: their use of readership research

Australia's two major print medium organisations, News Ltd and Fairfax, continually conduct research on behalf of the newsrooms of their capital city newspapers, although for Fairfax, the concentration on editorial research is the product of the past three years, following a long period of relative inactivity. Two more large print media organisations, Australian Provincial Newspapers and Rural Press, are less active in editorial research. APN gatekeepers reported little editorial research done in recent years, while Rural Press journalists said they had access to "generic" research, which tended to be done for advertising purposes but which was passed on to editorial departments for possible use. Such use was not geographic or title-specific, but rather tended to deal with large markets and did not address specific areas of editorial content. APN has 16 daily newspapers and dozens of weekly publications grouped in the eastern states, while Rural Press publishes weekly and bi-weekly newspapers in country areas throughout the nation.

The industry has not settled upon a standard time frame for periodic research – respondents reported research occurring from once a year to less than every five years.

Section B of the survey revealed Australian copy-tasters' rate their exposure to readership research as very low. Of 22 categories of news, the mean (on a scale of one to four) rose above 2 for only five categories. The highest mean response of 2.45 was returned for the Local News category (the other four were Good News, Bad News, Neighbourhood Activities and Youth Activities). But even in these areas, respondents reported only small effects on the content of their papers – only 93 respondents reported an increase in Local News content as a result of seeing research about the topic, 72 reported an increase in Neighbourhood News, 108 an increase in Youth Activities, 66 an increase in Good News and 26 a decrease in Bad News. This "low-effect" response would seem to be an indicator of journalists' lack of confidence in readership research results, and of their contention that journalists' experience counts for more than readership research results.

The group's demographics reflect the characteristics Henningham found in his national survey (Henningham, 207) of Australian journalists. Men outnumber women two to one (204 to 100) and nearly 30 per cent (29.4%) are in the 26-35 age bracket, with 28.1 per cent 36-45 and 27.7 per cent 46-55.

Respondents who started work straight from high school represent the largest education group (39.7%), although when the group with bachelor degrees (30.5%) is added to the group with part-completed degrees (10.9%), then tertiary-educated journalists comprise the largest group. Seven respondents had Masters degrees; none had PhDs.

Of those who responded to questions about their political leanings, the majority saw themselves as being politically conservative, with 129 rating themselves as middle of the road, another 84 saying they were left of centre and 65 nominating themselves as right of centre.

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The most interesting results, however, come from the ANOVA tests. ANOVAs were conducted using a number of class variables, including responses to the questions about agenda-setting, title or position within an organisation, gender, education and political leanings.

The ANOVA for agenda-setting responses revealed only two significant differences in responses to other questions but importantly, they both referred to copy-tasters' attitudes towards research. Respondents who believed a paper's function was to follow the news agenda (N=77) rated readership research less useful than those who believed a paper should set the agenda (N=80, mean responses 3.28 to 3.41 on a four-point scale, at the 0.05 level of probability). And respondents who thought a paper's function was a combination of setting and following the agenda (N=138) rated readership research more highly as an influence on news choice than did those who believed a paper's function was to set the agenda (2.71 to 2.53).

While the results may seem at odds with each other, they go some way towards explaining a bifurcated view of readership research occasionally volunteered by respondents: some respondents saw readership research as a panacea to falling circulation. In this view, journalists would ask readers what kind of stories they wanted more of, then produce a paper accordingly, with resultant circulation gains. On the other hand, some respondents, who thought a paper's function was to follow the news agenda would see readership research as a negative factor, influencing a journalist's perceived objectiveness. The opposing views reflect comments from newspaper market research officers and from journalists, volunteered during this study, about journalists's attitudes towards research: some journalists believe they know more about their market than any researcher could; other journalists want to use research as a crutch.

The ANOVA for education level showed respondents with Masters degrees placed less importance on reader feedback than the other groups in determining newsworthiness. But this was such a small group (N=7) that the result is unreliable.

The ANOVA for political leanings showed respondents who placed themselves at the far right of the political spectrum valued readership research more highly than the other groups, but again the group was small (N=7) and the result is unreliable. The differences observed for education level and political leanings, however, could be explained thus: Journalists with postgraduate-level education are more likely to take a social responsibility approach to copy-tasting (that is, give readers more of what they need, and less of what they think they want), and members of the far right (conservatives) are more likely to treat research results as prescriptions for content decisions.

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An ANOVA taking into account the respondents' employers showed predictably that gatekeepers at provincial daily newspapers, whose staple is local news, paid more attention to research about local news than did others. They also paid more attention to research about the betting sports than did others, and believed research had had a significant influence on the content of their front pages (mean 2.57 on a response scale of one to four). The same ANOVA showed gatekeepers at capital city dailies value the opinions of their peers more highly than gatekeepers employed elsewhere (mean 3.05).

Section editors (Sports Editors, Chief Subs, Feature Editors, Foreign Editors, Political Editors etc) tended to rate journalism experience more highly than others when judging a story's news value (mean 3.68) and the only gender difference perceived was in the rating for reader feedback (men mean 3.21, women 3.42).

While the ANOVA tests are of themselves interesting, when seen in the light of other responses, they take on additional meaning. When asked to rate factors affecting news choices, for example, the gatekeepers responded (on a four-point scale):

Journalism experience	3.44
Feedback from readers	3.28
Peers' opinions	2.70
Readership research	2.60
Feedback from other depts	2.28
What opposition is doing	2.21

But when asked to rate six groups in terms of who knows best what should go on the news agenda, respondents gave the top rating thus:

Journalists	120
Audience	116
Public	55
Audience researchers	15
Government	1
Other authorities	1

In other words, although gatekeepers rate journalism experience higher than readership research, they rated themselves as the best judges of newsworthiness only 40 per cent of the time (120 out of 304). When the audience (readers) is combined with the Public (readers and non-readers), gatekeepers conceded the high ground to their target market by 175 to 120. The responses may help explain gatekeepers' preference for a combined setting/following approach to the news agenda, because a figure of just 40 per cent in favour of journalists setting the agenda indicates a lack of confidence on the part of the gatekeepers – a lack of confidence reflected in their reluctance to choose between setting and following and, perhaps, influenced by the decade-long drop in circulation figures.

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In other responses, gatekeepers feel that policies about using readership research are poorly set out for newsrooms (mean 1.85 on a scale of one to four) and are not very closely followed in copy-tasting (mean 2.31). However, they say readership research is important to them and they would like to have greater exposure to it (mean 3.32). They saw little danger of the market researchers taking over the newsroom (mean 1.9) or of readership data being abused (mean 2.42). These responses reflect a lower level of concern in the Australian industry than in US industry about market researchers dictating content to journalists, probably because the education of Australian journalists is only now starting to include MBA-type programs. The responses also show that for all their lack of confidence in readership research, journalists would like to know more about research and how to use it, and they feel that research results and possibilities have been poorly communicated to newsrooms.

One of the most telling statistics about readership research at Australian newspapers comes not from this survey, but from the ABC figures for the last six months of 1997, reported in the PANPA Bulletin (11). The Bulletin reported that Fairfax's Sydney Sunday newspaper, The Sun-Herald, had a 9.4% circulation growth in the period, reversing a 10-year sales trend and making it the fastest growing newspaper in Australia with a leap from 548,333 copies to just over 600,000. The growth comes after major revamps of some sections of the paper, the addition of new sections and the insertion of a new colour magazine. The changes came only after extensive market research. Interviews conducted with market researchers and gatekeepers at the major News Ltd and Fairfax papers revealed that gatekeepers at Fairfax's Sydney daily and Sunday newspapers were more satisfied with the relationship they enjoyed with the market research department than gatekeepers anywhere else. They reported being aware of the relevant market research and of having had it explained carefully to them, while section heads at other papers where revamps had occurred reported ignorance of the market research behind the changes, despite market researchers recounting meetings with senior editorial figures. The conclusion must be that at least part of The Sun-Herald's spectacular circulation rise must be due to thoughtful market research carefully explained to the gatekeepers responsible for revamped sections, and implemented through clearly outlined office procedures which allow gatekeepers and senior editors to check the effects of their decision-making.

Conclusions

This paper concludes that journalists have a bifurcated view of readership research. While they feel declining circulation could be arrested by having recourse to readership research results, they also feel journalism experience is more important than research. The inherent dilemma of such a view is apparent in the fact they rated audience members more suited to set the news agenda than journalists. The major problem for Australian gatekeepers may lie in their lack of exposure to research and poor organisational procedures for delivering research findings in an easily understood form.

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Australian newspapers could well be rewarded with increased circulations if they placed more emphasis on readership research in their newsrooms.

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Sources of the Decline in Newspaper Reading

Examining Long-Term Changes by Means of Nonlinear Trend Decomposition

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Abstract

In many Western countries, newspaper reading has declined in the past decades. Intercohort differences apparently play a role, younger birth cohorts reading less frequently. Applying a new method of trend decomposition, this research investigates how much of the decline in U.S. and German newspaper readership during the past 25 years was due to cohort succession (in conjunction with intercohort differences). Results indicate that cohort succession contributed substantially to past declines and works toward future declines.

In the past decades, downward trends in newspaper reading have been observed in many countries. Particularly strong declines have been reported from the U.S. (Gollin, 1991; Mayer, 1993; Meyer, 1985; Robinson, 1980). But readership levels have also lowered in a number of European countries (Gustafsson & Weibull, 1996). At least in part triggered by these developments, a large number of research projects investigating newspaper use and its determinants have been conducted (Bogart, 1989; Stone, 1987).

One segment of the population that has attracted particular attention because of its increasingly lower readership levels is young people (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978). Accordingly, much of recent research about newspaper use has focused on this group (e.g., Schlagheck, 1997; Wanta & Gao, 1994). In particular, previous research indicates that there is a negative cohort effect on newspaper reading, meaning that young birth cohorts tend to read less than cohorts born earlier (Basil, 1990; Glenn, 1994; Gollin, 1991; Meyer, 1985; Peiser, 1996, 1997; Robinson, 1980; Robinson & Jeffres, 1979; Stevenson, 1994).

This study is concerned with how and to what extent past declines in newspaper reading in the U.S. and in Germany can be explained by such cohort effects. Before appreciating the significance of cohort effects for past and future trends in newspaper reading, a number of important concepts (cohort, cohort effect, cohort succession) and the connections between them must first be discussed in some detail.

A birth cohort is a group of people born about the same time (Glenn, 1977). Researchers often define cohorts operationally by combining an arbitrary number of adjacent years of birth such as 1920-1929, 1930-1939, and so forth. Those who belong to the same cohort grow up together and are exposed to similar political, social, and cultural influences at about the same age. Accordingly, today's different cohorts have been socialized in potentially dissimilar ways (e.g., without or with electronic media). In general, experiences made during childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood may have a life-long influence on cohorts' values, attitudes, and behavior (Glenn, 1980).

If there are enduring differences between cohorts (intercohort differences) with respect to some characteristic such as newspaper reading, this is called a cohort effect. A cohort effect on newspaper reading means that newspaper reading is influenced by one or more factors associated with (or indexed by) cohort membership. If the cohorts are ordered from oldest (earliest years of birth) to youngest (most recent years of birth), the finding that the younger cohorts tend to read less would be referred to as a negative cohort effect on newspaper reading.

The significance of cohort effects lies in that they are part of a dynamic process explaining social change (Ryder, 1965). Consider the adult population of a country, divided in birth cohorts of ten years each, at a given point in time. Ten years later, the oldest of these cohorts will have exited, and a new cohort will have entered the population. Another ten years later, the second oldest cohort will have exited, too, and a second new cohort will have entered; and so forth. After three or four decades have passed, half of the population will consist of new people. This demographic process in which younger cohorts continuously replace older cohorts is called cohort succession (Riley, 1973), or cohort replacement (Firebaugh, 1989).

Now, if the cohorts differ consistently with respect to newspaper readership, younger cohorts reading less on average than cohorts born earlier, cohort succession (in this case the replacement of more frequent readers by less frequent readers) will bring about a gradual decline in newspaper reading in society unless there are other influences working in the opposite direction. As mentioned above, past research on trends in newspaper reading has pointed to cohort effects. Although these effects have been clearly identified only by few of the studies (see Peiser, 1996, 1997), there is little doubt that intercohort differences working toward a decline in newspaper reading do exist.

Because cohort effects on newspaper reading, particularly if differences between cohorts follow a monotonic pattern, will bring about gradual long-term change in aggregate readership, they deserve close attention, not only by communication scholars but also by the newspaper industry. Understandably, then, the fact that young people's readership is increasingly lower, the possibility that this reflects stable intercohort differences, and the implication of such intercohort differences for future trends in newspaper reading are discussed in the newspaper management and marketing literature (Lavine & Wackman, 1988; Meyer, 1985; Thorn, 1987).

But much of the discussion is based on rather weak or ambiguous evidence. About ten years ago, Cobb (1986) observed that previous studies investigating newspaper reading "fail to demonstrate how and why newspaper readership changes over time" (p. 301). While Cobb mainly referred to age-related changes, the same observation applies to aggregate change. In particular, it is not clear how important cohort succession is as a source of change in newspaper reading. How much of the declines in reading during the past decades is accounted for by intercohort differences and the process of cohort replacement? And how strong were other influences? These are the main questions to be addressed in this paper. Based on the answers, predictions about the likely future development of newspaper reading will be possible.

Method of Analysis

In this section, the method used to estimate different sources of the trends in newspaper reading is described. Following a short introduction to the general logic of trend decomposition, a major problem of previous decomposition methods is discussed. After that, a new approach to trend decomposition that was employed in this study is introduced. Information about the secondary data used will be provided in the next section.

Estimating Cohort Replacement Change and Intracohort Change

If the contribution of cohort replacement to a long-term trend observed in the behavior of a country's population is to be assessed, it must first be clear what different factors can account for the change. In general, two dynamic factors may be distinguished (Glenn, 1977, pp. 22-23). One is cohort replacement, the demographic process of continuous replacement of older birth cohorts by more recent birth cohorts (new cohorts enter a population while the oldest cohorts die off). This process of cohort replacement, or cohort succession, will bring about change in the population's aggregate attitudes or behavior if there are enduring attitudinal or behavioral differences between cohorts. Consider the simple example of educational attainment, which is a typical cohort-related variable. More recent cohorts are higher educated formally, and these intercohort differences persist when cohorts grow older, thus cohort replacement leads to a gradual increase in level of formal education in society. The extent to which cohort replacement determines aggregate change also depends on the size of the cohorts entering or leaving the population.

The other factor is change within birth cohorts. In most cases, this type of long-term change is investigated not with panel data but with a series of representative cross-sectional surveys, which permits to follow cohorts (but not individuals) through time. For example, if we have two independent surveys conducted in 1980 and in 1990, we may look at the change within the cohort born 1951-1960 who was aged 20-29 in 1980 and 30-39 in 1990. Even though we are not tracing the same individuals here, we are dealing with samples from the same population. Therefore, average within-cohort change (or intracohort change) may be regarded as a surrogate measure of net individual-level change. While the two factors, cohort replacement change and intracohort change, can be distinguished from each other both theoretically and empirically, they often work in the same direction (Glenn, 1977, p. 52).

So the overall trend in the population may be decomposed into two trend components: average change within cohorts (intracohort change) and change due to cohort replacement, in conjunction with intercohort differences (cohort replacement change). A number of statistical methods have been used to determine the contribution of each of the two components to total change in the population. Firebaugh (1989) provides an overview of different approaches (see also Firebaugh, 1997). Some of the simpler methods are discussed by Glenn (1977). Other variants have been employed by Davis (1992) and by Firebaugh and Davis (1988).

Basically, two approaches may be distinguished: regression-based linear decomposition, the dependent variable being regressed on year of survey and year of birth, and algebraic methods (Firebaugh, 1989). While decomposition based on linear regression is the more elegant way, it assumes, among other things, that change within cohorts is linear. Thus, this method of decomposition is less suitable when overall change in the population is not monotonic. Algebraic methods, in contrast, are not subject to this limitation. Here, within-cohort change is calculated from one cross-sectional survey to the next, whereas in the regression approach, one common within-cohort trend is estimated across all cross-sectional surveys.

However, all of the decomposition methods used up to now appear to suffer from a common problem (Rodgers, 1990). Within-cohort change, as estimated by these methods, actually comes from one or both of two different sources: first, changes associated with aging; second, changes due to external influences affecting the whole population independent of age.[1] In cohort analysis, these two sources are referred to as age effect and period effect respectively. Now the problem is that in fact only one of these, namely, the period effect, is relevant as a source of overall change in the population. The other part of the within-cohort trend (reflecting changes due to cohorts' aging) cannot contribute substantially to overall change because the population's age structure remains largely the same. Over 15 or 20 years, which would be a typical period of study, the average age of a population doesn't change much.

Consider the case of television viewing. It is well known that among adults, viewing increases with age (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, & Roberts, 1978). But over one or two decades, the proportion of younger people and the proportion of older adults remain largely unchanged. Therefore, differences in TV viewing that are due to aging (as opposed to cohort membership) cannot be responsible for big shifts in aggregate TV viewing in the population. But if there is a substantial age effect, the estimate of intracohort change will as well contain a part of this age-related individual-level change that is largely irrelevant to overall change (Rodgers, 1990). Hence, biased estimates of the contribution of intracohort change and cohort replacement change, respectively, to overall change in television viewing would be obtained.

For this reason, decomposition of overall change into within-cohort change and change due to cohort replacement would seem to make sense only if there is no effect of aging on the dependent variable under study (Glenn, 1977, pp. 22-23).[2] For many attitudinal and behavioral characteristics, then, trend decomposition would not be meaningful. Newspaper reading most certainly is a case in point because according to research findings, readership increases with age at least up to middle age (Bogart, 1989; Stone, 1987). Therefore, a new approach to trend decomposition was developed.

Trend Decomposition Based on Age-Period-Cohort Modeling

The basic consideration behind this approach is that if the presence of an age effect will lead to biased estimates of the relative importance of within-cohort change and cohort replacement change, respectively, this age effect must be controlled when decomposing the overall trend. It must be made sure that the age effect cannot enter into the estimates of the two trend components so that within-cohort change reflects solely external influences (the period effect) and change due to cohort replacement is based only on intercohort differences (the cohort effect). To control for aging while estimating period and cohort effects, age-period-cohort modeling can be used (Mason, Mason, Winsborough, & Poole, 1973; Fienberg & Mason, 1978).

Briefly, age-period-cohort modeling works with data from several cross-sectional surveys organized by age group and year so that the same birth cohorts can be identified in each of the surveys and thus be traced over time. Using dummy-variable regression analysis or logit modeling (according to the scale of the dependent variable), one coefficient is estimated for each of the age groups, for each year, and for each of the cohorts. All age coefficients taken together will be referred to as the age effect, and the same principle applies to period effect and cohort effect, respectively. Because of the identification problem in age-period-cohort analysis, one or more constraints have to be imposed on the estimated parameters (see Mason et al., 1973). In this study, the age-period-cohort models were identified by constraining the coefficients of two age groups to be equal (58-62 and 63-67, in the model for the U.S. data; 60-64 and 65-69, in the model for the German data). In each case, the constraint was chosen based on prior knowledge about the development of newspaper reading over the life cycle. For a more detailed description of age-period-cohort modeling and its peculiarities, see Peiser (1997).

So the first step is to estimate the parameters of an age-period-cohort model. Based on the estimated age, period, and cohort effects, the new method of trend decomposition proceeds as follows. Now the contribution of aging must be eliminated from overall change.[3] To do this, the age coefficients obtained in the first model are included as fixed parameters in all subsequent models. This is equivalent to subtracting the age effect from the dependent variable. Then, a second model is estimated, including only the period effect. The coefficients of the period dummy variables obtained in this model represent corrected overall changes. There is one value for each year of survey, the first year's value being zero if dummy variables are coded 0/1. This rescaling doesn't matter, of course, since we are interested only in changes from year to year and not in absolute levels.

To decompose these corrected aggregate changes, a third model is estimated, including period effect and cohort effect. Now the coefficients of the period dummy variables represent estimated pure intracohort change (net of changes due to aging). Calculating differences between these coefficients yields intracohort change from one year of survey to the next. With an age-period-cohort model based on dummy variables (instead of continuous variables), the estimate of intracohort change is not restricted to a linear trend; change over the years may follow any nonlinear pattern. Thus, the approach used here is a method of nonlinear trend decomposition, having the same advantages as the algebraic methods described in the literature (Firebaugh, 1989, 1997).

The coefficients of the cohort dummy variables in the third model represent estimated pure intercohort differences. Based on these coefficients, the part of the overall trend that is due to cohort replacement is estimated. To achieve this, we need to know for each year of survey the contribution to the dependent variable mean that is made by the population's current cohort composition and the characteristics of these respective cohorts (i.e., the cohorts who were in the population at the time when the survey was conducted). Hence, for each year the mean of the respective cohorts' estimated coefficients is calculated weighting the cohorts by their size. Calculating differences between these weighted averages then gives cohort replacement change from one year of survey to the next. Typically, over the whole period cohort replacement change will be gradual (Glenn, 1977).

Because in the present study the variables to be analyzed were dichotomies (see below), age-period-cohort analysis was performed using logit modeling, and trend decomposition, as described above, was conducted for the trend in the logits (see also Firebaugh & Davis, 1988). The approach is the same in this case as with metric dependent variables and multiple regression analysis. However, one difference arises when it comes to comparing estimated total change (the sum of the two trend components estimated) with the changes actually observed. In the case of the linear regression model, the decomposition is perfect, whereas observed and estimated total change will be different to a certain degree if the decomposition is based on a logit model. As the interpretation of changes in logits is not very straightforward, all decomposition results were reexpressed in terms of percentage points (absolute changes in percentages).[4]

Before proceeding with the description of the data used, one point should be emphasized. It is important to keep in mind that due to the different method of decomposition employed here (based solely on cohort and period effects), the meaning of the two components of change is not the same as in the literature. Here, intracohort change is restricted to individual change other than age-related changes. And cohort replacement change means change due to cohort succession in conjunction with a cohort effect (the fact that older people are replaced by younger people is irrelevant here).

Secondary Data

To arrive at a sound assessment of the importance of cohort replacement (in conjunction with a cohort effect), readership data from two different countries--the U.S. and Germany--were analyzed. For both countries, a downward trend in newspaper readership has been reported.

U.S. Data

Data on newspaper reading in the United States were taken from the General Social Survey (Davis & Smith, 1992). This survey has been conducted almost annually since 1972. Generally, GSS samples are representative of the adult U.S. population. In many (but not all) of the years in which the GSS went into field, a question about newspaper use was asked. The decision which of these years to include in the analysis was based on some formal considerations.

In order to perform a trend decomposition based on the age-period-cohort model, the data must be arranged in the form of a standard cohort table (see Glenn, 1977). This is a table age group by year of survey, where the intervals between surveys are equal and at the same time correspond to the width of each of the age groups so that the birth cohorts can be traced in the diagonals (e.g., see Tables 1 and 2 below). In the present case, intervals of five years were chosen. Hence, the surveys conducted in 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1991, and 1996 were included. There is a minor deviation between the structure of the resulting table and that of a standard cohort table because 1987 and 1991 are only four years apart. As the newspaper reading question was not asked in every year in which the GSS was fielded, there was no better choice. Black oversamples in 1982 and in 1987 were excluded and the data were weighted to transform the household samples into representative samples of individuals (Davis & Smith, 1992).

Corresponding to the intervals between the surveys used, 13 age groups of 5 years each were formed, ranging from 18-22 to 78-82 years.[5] To avoid getting too many cells with low frequencies in the logit analysis, respondents over age 82 were excluded. Given the above 6 cross-sectional surveys and the chosen division into 13 age groups, 18 birth cohorts were formed, the first born 1890-1894 and the last 1974-1978. After these various steps of data preparation, the total size of the pooled samples was 8,897 (there was a further loss of respondents due to the fact that in the more recent years, the question about newspaper reading was asked only in a subsample).

In the GSS, newspaper reading is measured with the following question: "How often do you read the newspaper--every day, a few times a week, once a week, less than once a week, or never?" In this study, the proportion of respondents who said they read the newspaper every day was used. This is the group of very regular readers whose number has decreased so markedly in the past decades, as already noted by various researchers who also used GSS data to investigate trends in newspaper reading (Meyer, 1985; Robinson, 1980; Stevenson, 1994).

German Data

For newspaper reading in Germany, data from a long-term study of general media use were analyzed (see Kiefer, 1996). In all, six cross-sectional surveys, conducted in 1970, 1974, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995, were available. All of them were included in the analysis. Because the long-term study was limited to West Germany prior to 1990, respondents from East Germany were excluded from the 1990 and 1995 survey data. Thus, all cross-sections analyzed are samples from the West German population aged 14 and over. To improve comparability across surveys, data were checked and edited once again, and new poststratification weights were constructed (see Peiser, 1996).

The intervals between the surveys are 4.5, 6, 5, 5, and 5 years, respectively (while fieldwork was generally done in autumn, the 1970 survey was fielded in spring). Hence, as with the GSS data, there are small deviations from the structure of a standard cohort table. Again, 13 age groups were formed, ranging from 15-19 to 75-79 years in this case. Respondents aged 14 were excluded because complete micro-census data (which were used to construct poststratification weights) were available only for this age classification. Respondents aged over 79 were excluded for reasons of insufficient cell size. Based on these data, 18 cohorts were identified, the first born 1891-1895 and the last 1976-1980. The total size of the pooled samples weighted for analysis was 11,606 (see Peiser, 1996).

In the German long-term study, newspaper reading on the day before the interview was recorded by means of a time diary. Respondents were asked to indicate what they had been doing in each quarter of an hour between 5 a.m. and 12 p.m. For this study, those who reported reading the newspaper in at least one quarter of an hour (the readers "yesterday") were contrasted with all other respondents. It is important to note that this yields a rather strict measure of "read yesterday." While there was a follow-up, it was not included here in determining readership.[6] Thus, the proportion of respondents who read the newspaper on the day before according to the completed time diary was used as the dependent variable. Because in each of the surveys the distribution of interviews over the days of the week was designed to be uniform, this proportion has a more general interpretation if aggregated data are looked at: After aggregation of interviews conducted on Tuesday to Sunday we have the proportion of respondents reading the newspaper on an average working day (Monday to Saturday).

In sum, data for both countries are very similar technically. The measures of newspaper reading are somewhat less similar. For the U.S., we have the proportion reading the newspaper daily, whereas in the German survey, it is the proportion reading the newspaper on an average working day (including readers who do not read a newspaper on a daily basis but who read one on the day before the interview). Thus, the readership variable in the U.S. data is a more specific measure. Measures in both countries' data are sensitive to changes in frequency of newspaper reading in the population. However, the proportion of daily readers in the U.S. is much more sensitive to changes from daily reading to less than daily reading, but it is completely insensitive to changes below the level of "a few times a week" (which is the second response category after "daily").

Results

First, it is useful to look at the standard cohort tables in order to get an impression of the data on which the results are based (Tables 1 and 2). From the data, we can see that there was a decline in newspaper reading in the past quarter of a century in both the U.S. and Germany. The decline was much stronger in the U.S., however, whereas in Germany, newspaper reading was comparatively stable up to 1985. In each of the surveys, we can see that readership is lower in the younger age groups. But this is only in part due to aging;

the fact that the gap between young people and the older part of the population has widened in both countries points to intercohort differences.

Tables 1 & 2 about here

To get some idea of these differences, it is useful to compare the diagonals in each table with one another, from the oldest cohort (lower left corner of the table) to the youngest cohort (upper right corner). It can be seen that readership tends to be considerably lower among the younger cohorts. However, the cohorts in these tables differ with respect to age and time of measurement, too. For example, the younger cohorts' data are more recent and they pertain to younger ages. Hence, these cohorts' lower readership levels may be in part due to period influences and to age-related factors.

But principally, differences between diagonals refer to the contribution of cohort replacement (in conjunction with intercohort differences) to the overall trend. Intracohort change, the other component, refers to trends within these diagonals. While we are interested only in period influences here (affecting all cohorts), changes within the diagonals of the tables reflect age-related influences as well. In sum, inspecting standard cohort tables does not permit a precise assessment of cohort and period effects. Still, these tables are useful in that they can give a somewhat better idea of the data analyzed, which is why they are presented here.

Based on these data, trend decomposition was carried out using an age-period-cohort logit model. Controlling for the age effect, and thus also for variations due to the population's changing age structure, the contribution of intracohort change and the contribution of change due to cohort replacement (in conjunction with intercohort differences) were estimated. Results will be presented for each country in turn. Table 3 gives the estimated change components for U.S. newspaper reading.

Table 3 about here

As the first row in Table 3 indicates, there was a substantial decline in the seventies and again in the first half of the nineties. Between 1982 and 1991, in contrast, daily newspaper reading in the U.S. remained comparatively stable. Only in this period intracohort change was positive, whereas cohorts' reading declined on average in the seventies and nineties. Compared with that, the contribution of cohort replacement change was negative in each of the five periods. It also appears that the importance of cohort replacement and intercohort differences as a force behind the decline in U.S. newspaper reading increased over the years.

Looking at cumulative change (last column in the table), it can be seen that the contribution of cohort replacement change to the total decline was a bit larger than the part accounted for by intracohort change. An average of -3.3 percentage points decrease in each of the five intervals was due to cohort replacement change, whereas within-cohort change was -2.6 percentage points on average. Thus, according to the estimates, 44 percent of the decline that occurred between 1972 and 1996 were accounted for by intracohort change, and 56 percent were due to cohort replacement change.[7] Figure 1 provides a summary of the results for U.S. newspaper reading.

Figure 1 about here

In Germany, newspaper reading on an average working day declined not as strongly as daily reading did in the United States (Table 4). At the beginning of the seventies, there was even an increase in newspaper reading. After 1974, reading began to decline, and particularly severe losses occurred after 1985. Interestingly, a large number of respondents in 1990 (22 percent) and in 1995 (15 percent) did not qualify as readers "yesterday" according to the completed time diary but said they actually read the newspaper on the day before the interview when questioned about that in the course of the follow-up procedure (which was not used here in determining readership). These percentages were much smaller in the other surveys. So that accounts for the large drop in readership after 1985. Perhaps the most probable explanation would be that those respondents' contact with the newspaper was so casual the day before the interview that they only remembered it when confronted with their reported nonreading in the follow-up procedure. This would point to a loosening of the newspaper reading habit in a considerable part of the population after 1985.[8]

Table 4 about here

As in the U.S., the contribution of cohort replacement change was negative in each of the five periods. Intracohort change, in contrast, was much less steady. In Germany, however, the relative importance of cohort replacement change as a source of the total decline in newspaper reading was not as high as in the United States. Within-cohort change in each of the five periods was -1.7 percentage points on average, and cohort replacement change contributed -1.0 percentage points on average. Thus, about one third of the decline in German newspaper reading was accounted for by cohort replacement change, as compared with a good half of the decline in the United States. Figure 2 summarizes the trends in Germany.

Figure 2 about here

Discussion

In both the U.S. and Germany, the frequency of newspaper reading declined in the past 25 years. As the results of the present study show, cohort succession (in conjunction with intercohort differences) made a steady and substantial contribution to this trend in both countries, accounting for half of the decline in the U.S. and for a third of the decline in Germany. Whithin-cohort change, in contrast, was positive in some periods and negative in others. In sum, cohort replacement change has proved to be an important source of the decline in newspaper reading.

Some cautionary remarks seem in order, however. Most important, it must be kept in mind that the method of trend decomposition employed in this study is based on age-period-cohort modeling. Thus, the general problems of cohort analysis are relevant here, too (Glenn, 1977; Mason et al., 1973; Rodgers, 1982). Due to the age-period-cohort identification problem, the effects estimated in model-based cohort analyses are always somewhat uncertain. In the present context, this means that while we can be relatively sure about the order of magnitude of the contribution made by cohort replacement change and by intracohort change, respectively, the exact magnitude of the two components may in fact be somewhat different.

Another point concerns the nature of the decline in newspaper reading. It is important to note that there were no substantial increases in newspaper nonreading during the past decades in both countries.[9] So here we are dealing largely with a decline in the frequency of reading (in the case of the U.S., with a decline in daily reading) among the group of newspaper readers. Moreover, the trends investigated in this paper are based on data from specific surveys (the GSS and the German long-term study). There are, however, other surveys that do not show negative trends in newspaper reading that are as marked as those analyzed here (Robinson & Jeffres, 1981).

Therefore, the focus should be less on the magnitude of the overall trend or on the exact magnitude of the trend components but rather on the approximate relative importance of the two components. Given the findings of previous research indicating negative cohort effects, it is certainly not surprising that the contribution of cohort replacement change to the aggregate trend in newspaper reading has turned out to be negative in both countries. Nor does it come as a surprise that change due to cohort replacement is monotonic, for largely monotonic cohort effects (readership tending to decline from cohort to cohort) were to be expected.

However, the magnitude of the contribution made by cohort replacement change is impressive, at least in the United States. This is even more true if educational attainment of younger versus older cohorts is taken into account. Given the intercohort differences in formal education, younger cohorts should be more frequent readers than older cohorts. The fact that the reverse is true points even more to strong forces pulling young cohorts away from the daily newspaper. A number of at least in part cohort-related factors have been discussed in the literature (Bogart, 1989; Stone, 1987). For example, younger cohorts might be less frequent readers due to their higher mobility, hence weaker community ties, or due to time scarcity (a higher proportion living in double-income families). The intercohort differences that are part of the strong cohort replacement components found in this study may reflect these and many other factors.

One important mechanism most certainly contributed, and continues to contribute, to the negative cohort effect. According to previous research, the habit of newspaper reading is passed on from one generation to the next within families. A study by the Newspaper Advertising Bureau (1977) showed that early contact with the newspaper at home is positively associated with a strong reading habit in adulthood. Stone and Wetherington (1979) found that students' newspaper reading was significantly and positively associated with their parents' newspaper reading. Similarly, Cobb (1986) reports significant positive correlations between youths' newspaper readership and their parents' newspaper readership.

If newspaper reading is declining in the population, more and more children will be raised by parents who do not read the newspaper on a regular basis. Thus, more and more children will be unlikely to develop a strong newspaper reading habit; thus, more and more children won't pass on the reading habit later in their own families; and so forth. In this way, intergenerational dynamics within families transforms to negative intercohort differences at the society level and reinforces these differences. Accordingly, Stone and Wetherington (1979) note that based on this mechanism, the aggregate decline in newspaper reading is likely to continue in the future. Due to the dynamics of the process, the decline might even accelerate (Roberts & Bachen, 1981, pp. 314-315). Interestingly, the amount of negative change in U.S. newspaper reading that is due to cohort replacement has increased since the early seventies (see Table 3 and Figure 1), which might reflect intergenerational dynamics within families.

While the impact of specific factors behind the negative cohort effects was not assessed in this study, some more general conclusions may be drawn based on the findings. Most important, the substantial negative contribution of cohort replacement change to the overall trend means a high probability that there will be a further decline in newspaper reading in the future. Indeed, a further decline does appear inevitable unless future within-cohort changes are throughout positive and fairly strong, thus compensating for the decline due to cohort replacement. To illustrate the order of magnitude, American cohorts' daily newspaper reading would have to increase by over half a percentage point every year for the overall level of reading in the population to remain stable.

Of course, newspapers' continuing marketing efforts may lead to positive intracohort changes in reading (as it appears to have in the U.S. in the eighties). But aggregate daily newspaper reading may well continue to decline, albeit at a slower pace. To evaluate the success of newspapers' marketing efforts, therefore, the steady negative contribution of cohort replacement change has to be taken into account. Then, newspapers may be judged to perform fairly well if the decline in reading levels off somewhat.

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Footnotes

1. Similarly, age-related changes also enter into the second trend component (cohort replacement change), as estimated by conventional methods of trend decomposition.

2. However, some researchers maintain that trend decomposition is also useful if an age effect is present (Davis, 1992; Firebaugh, 1990). In their view, the age effect need not be controlled, thus avoiding the age-period-cohort identification problem.

3. Fact is that the age effect (in conjunction with cohort replacement) does contribute to overall change in the population to a certain degree. One important reason for this is that birth cohorts differ in their size. Think of the baby boom cohorts, for example. When these large cohorts reached middle age (and became more frequent readers for age-related reasons), this had a positive impact on the overall level of newspaper reading in the population. Experience shows, however, that aggregate change that is due to the changing age structure of the population will be rather small. In this study, this part of aggregate change was in the order of less than one percentage point over a period of 25 years. But it is important to note that the small magnitude of this component is in part explained by the fact that the oldest part of the population (people aged over 82 or over 79 years, respectively) was excluded from the data (see below), thus eliminating the contribution of increasing longevity on aggregate change.

4. To give an idea of how that was done, consider the case of converting the intracohort change (in the logit) that occurred between time 1 and time 2. Calculating the time 1 percentage from the time 1 logit is straightforward. The next step is to add the estimated intracohort change (in the logit) between time 1 and time 2 to the time 1 logit. The result is a logit at time 2, namely, the logit that would have been observed if there had been no change due to cohort replacement. Next, this logit is converted to a percentage. Finally, the difference between this percentage and the time 1 percentage is calculated, yielding the estimated intracohort change expressed in terms of percentage points.

5. As the GSS is fielded in spring, and because age is measured indirectly by recording the respondent's year of birth and then converting, there are only very few respondents aged 18 in the original GSS data (Davis & Smith, 1992). Most of those aged 18 at the time of the survey are assigned age 19 when converting year of birth into age. For this study, therefore, respondents' age (as included in the original GSS data) was decreased by one year, yielding about the age respondents would have reported had they been asked directly to give their age.

6. After the completion of the time diary, interviewers checked for each of the daily media whether or not it had been used the day before. If not, they asked the respondent whether he or she had actually not used the medium. Usually some of those who were first recorded as nonreaders "yesterday" then indicated that they had indeed read the newspaper on the day before the interview. This follow-up question, however, was omitted in some of the surveys. Hence, it was not used in this study in determining who qualified as a newspaper reader "yesterday."

7. These percentages are based on the sum of the estimated trend components, as given in row 4 of the table. This estimated total change differs somewhat from the observed total change (as the decomposition is based on a logit model).

8. About 1985, cable and satellite television, and with that private television channels, were introduced in Germany.

9. According to Meyer (1985), however, hardcore nonreaders are largely irrelevant to the newspaper industry anyway. Newspapers' marketing efforts, he argues, should be directed at increasing reading frequency among newspaper readers.

Table 1

Daily Newspaper Reading in the U.S., 1972-1996 (Standard Cohort Table)

Year	1972	1977	1982	1987	1991	1996
Age group						
18-22	47	41	28	35	20	18
23-27	50	46	37	33	32	21
28-32	66	55	55	41	39	24
33-37.	**73**	59	47	57	39	34
38-42	78	**64**	51	59	60	42
43-47	85	70	**59**	55	60	45
48-52	74	77	62	**70**	63	58
53-57	81	77	70	66	**64**	59
58-62	78	85	66	75	72	**61**
63-67	73	77	72	73	72	71
68-72	75	77	71	67	74	73
73-77	73	78	53	64	92	78
78-82	85	68	80	83	67	58
Total (18-82)	69	64	53	55	52	42

Note. Figures are percentages of respondents who read the newspaper every day. The cohorts can be traced in the diagonals of the table (see bold-faced entries for cohort 10, born 1935-1939, as an example).

Table 2

Average Daily Newspaper Reading in Germany, 1970-1995 (Standard Cohort Table)

Year	1970	1974	1980	1985	1990	1995
Age group						
15-19	59	58	46	41	37	39
20-24	68	69	57	55	44	33
25-29	59	60	60	58	49	39
30-34	**60**	60	71	64	56	45
35-39	60	**67**	64	67	56	45
40-44	61	73	**67**	70	62	57
45-49	68	71	70	**74**	61	55
50-54	59	64	71	72	**62**	56
55-59	62	68	71	69	56	**57**
60-64	69	67	66	68	56	53
65-69	66	71	69	70	56	53
70-74	61	73	67	63	55	59
75-79	62	72	66	69	55	51
Total (15-79)	63	67	64	64	54	49

Note. Figures are percentages of respondents who read the newspaper on an average working day (Monday to Saturday). The cohorts can be traced in the diagonals of the table (see bold-faced entries for cohort 10, born 1936-1940, as an example).

Table 3

Components of Change in Daily Newspaper Reading in the U.S., 1972-1996

Time period	1972-77	1977-82	1982-87	1987-91	1991-96	1972-96
Observed total change	-5.7	-10.4	1.4	-3.2	-9.9	-27.8
Estimated intracohort change	-3.3	-7.9	4.5	0.4	-6.8	-13.1
Estimated cohort replacement change	-2.3	-3.1	-2.9	-3.8	-4.3	-16.4
Estimated total change (row 2 + row 3)	-5.7	-10.9	1.6	-3.5	-11.1	-29.5

Note. Figures are percentage differences referring to the percentage of respondents who read the newspaper every day.

Table 4

Components of Change in Average Daily Newspaper Reading in Germany, 1970-1995

Time period	1970-74	1974-80	1980-85	1985-90	1990-95	1970-95
Observed total change	4.1	-2.4	-0.6	-9.6	-5.0	-13.5
Estimated intracohort change	4.7	-1.3	0.9	-8.5	-4.6	-8.7
Estimated cohort replacement change	-0.6	-1.1	-1.5	-1.2	-0.4	-4.9
Estimated total change (row 2 + row 3)	4.1	-2.4	-0.6	-9.7	-5.0	-13.6

Note. Figures are percentage differences referring to the percentage of respondents who read the newspaper on an average working day (Monday to Saturday).

Figure 1. Cumulative change in newspaper reading in the U.S., 1972-1996, and its sources.

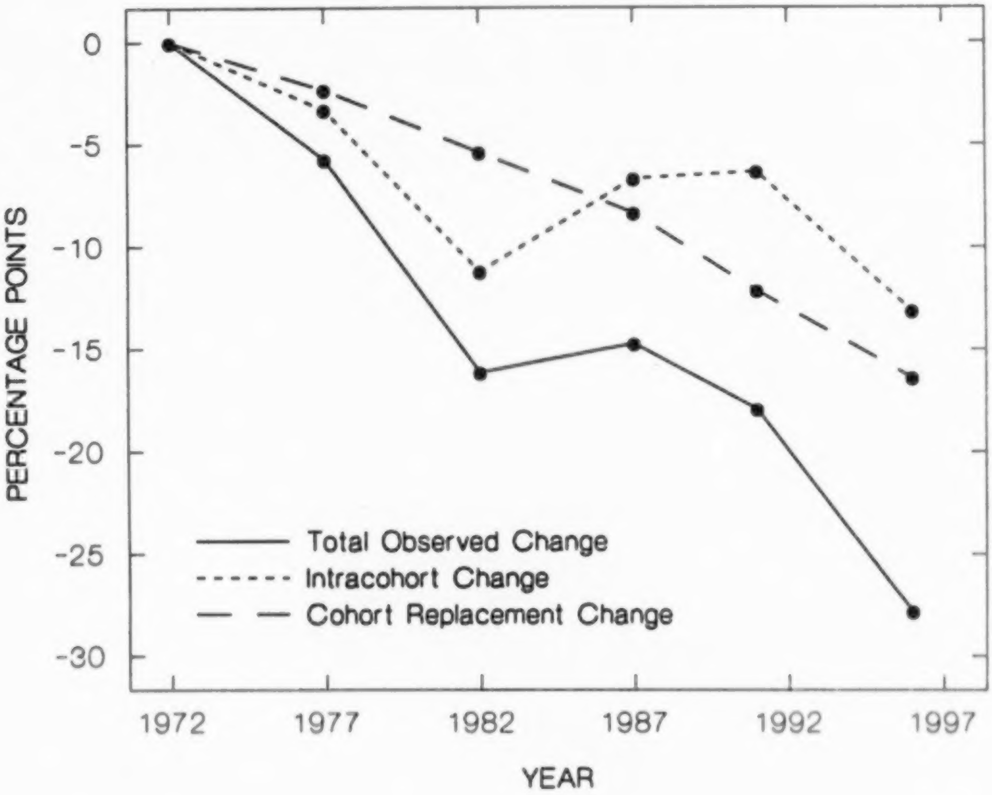

Figure 2. Cumulative change in newspaper reading in Germany, 1970-1995, and its sources.